

MAN EATER

HENRY MILNER RIDEOUT



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down

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KFRE - 84 -

KGO - 80 -

KJBS - 40 -

KPO - between 60 and 70
~~87~~

- 11 -

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CO - 80 -

IRS - 39 -

DD - *Captn. C. S. C. S. C. S.*

MAN EATER

BOOKS BY
HENRY M. RIDEOUT

BARBRY
THE WINTER BELL
FERN SEED
THE FOOT-PATH WAY
TIN COWRIE DASS
THE FAR CRY
KEY OF THE FIELDS
and BOLDERO
THE SIAMESE CAT
WHITE TIGER

WILLIAM JONES

MAN EATER

BY

HENRY MILNER RIDEOUT



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TO
ELLIE AVERY CAMPBELL
WITH LOVE.

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MAN EATER

PART ONE

MORGAN'S JAR

MAN EATER

MORGAN'S JAR

I.

DOWN the Red Sea moved in no hurry an Italian ship, her wake the only blemish on still water, her engines beating the only pulse of life in the air, and her smoke, which dropped away low and black to leeward, the one stain upon wide glory. From below the eastern line, out of Asia, the sun was rising.

On board all remained peaceful at this hour. White-sheeted bodies, ghosts in dirty cotton, cluttered the deck and the hatches, forward. Among them strolled two or three upright but pensive figures in khaki, soldiers, casuals for Aden. Aft, through the open door of the smoking-room, glimmered candles which a black-robed Goanese priest, young, thin, and sallow, was just lighting before the raised lid

of a portable altar much like a white croquet box, yet strangely solemn in the mingling of gloom and golden flicker. A second priest, some elderly timid passenger from Jerusalem, carrying a wine bottle with a silver lock, hurried as quiet as his own shadow along a sunlit bulkhead, climbed the threshold, and became mysterious within. A pair of Italian sailors, near by, watched him go, then with good-humored energy fell to their mopping of woodwork.

A young woman who enjoyed these early morning sights, passed on, and mounted a ladder to the upper deck, where beneath a double awning passengers of the first class had their own promenade. Not a spacious luxury, nor free from cinders, the deck gave room enough for a brisk walk alone before breakfast. This morning, however, the young woman found herself not alone there.

A man, of slender active body, was balancing on the rail, holding by one hand, by no more than the finger-tips, the edge of the lower awning, his face bent out, overboard.

The sight chilled her; but this girl, having a fairly good head, kept it. She would not call

or speak, but catch him before he jumped. She had never thought to see anyone do such a——

From the ladder-head to the rail was not far, though in her terror and helplessness it seemed a journey without end. The man swayed there, but did not jump. She came close below him.

"Ah, poor thing," he was saying, calmly. "Thought that would be the way of it."

At the same instant, she learned that he did not need rescuing. His head bent indeed over the side, but only so that he might peer back between the two awnings, where he now thrust his other hand, before turning to look down at her. His eyes, bright and dark, steadied her by their look of gentle preoccupation. It was plain that a man with such eyes never dreamed of jumping overboard from anything.

"Isn't that rather a dangerous place to stand on?"

She spoke quickly, with great desire to laugh. Neither must he ever dream that she had thought of catching a strange young gentleman by the legs. To her surprise, it was he who wore a shamefaced look.

"I'm quite all right, thanks," he replied. "But if it made you uneasy——"

He drew in, and jumped lightly to the deck. Bare-headed, the sunrise and a flush of embarrassment coloring his clear brown cheeks, he appeared at first as new to her as though he climbed aboard from this middle of the Red Sea. It cost her an effort to recall him. Though now disguised by animation, he was only a quiet youth who had come up the ladder at Suez, edged his way gently through a yelling horde of cigarette peddlers, and faded into the ship.

"Sorry," he murmured.

A vainer woman might have enjoyed his confusion, but this one did not guess. He seemed too humble. As a matter of fact, beauty always put him down, and now took him at a disadvantage, dazzled by fair hair, profound blue eyes lighted with humorous change, a neat figure in white, and the gilding of early sun.

On his palm lay a little gray-brown feathered thing. It would serve to help them past this moment of ridicule.

"What were you catching?"

He held it for her to see,—a young swallow,

dead, with legs and claws drawn up, shrivelled, and a peep of glazed eyeball between dry lids.

"One of the first autumn flight," he explained, "out of England or France. A baby. They fell aboard us last evening at sunset, ten or a dozen, and I tucked this chap between the awnings overnight, to keep Romeo's Tom from eating him. Labor in vain, you see, he died. Worn out. The older birds, father, mother, uncles and aunts, won't be crossing till a fortnight or so."

His hearer looked with pity.

"Poor little fellow," she said. "There are tragedies in the air, too."

The young man gave her a shy, thoughtful glance, nodded, and weighed the bundle of feathers on his hand.

"True. You are right. The old Erythræan main was too broad for those tiny wings, wasn't it?—Good-bye, brother."

He tossed the swallow overboard carefully, as though it were living and might fly again.

"Who is Romeo's Tom?"

He smiled.

"The ship's cat. Romeo Bisulca, our cook,

you know: his wall-eyed gray cat, named Val-
oroso."

She remembered they were strangers, and let him turn away if he chose. He went promptly with a bow, courteous but quick, like a passerby, leaving her to wonder how men knew or found out so much. Here she, an American, had lived on board since Naples, but had not heard of any Romeo; while this timid British youth who crept about nursing infant birds overnight and blushing when detected, could stammer the whole time-table of their winged thoroughfare, and tell her the name of their enemy the cat.

"I do believe he's a little naturalizing prig," she thought, for revenge. "Like a sermon. And you expected him to jump over! No doubt he's full of humanitomtitty."

She knew it was unjust, but now and then during the next forty-eight hours maintained her opinion, seeing him down the length of the table or of the deck as a quiet, clerical figure slim in Oxford gray flannel. He never did anything more than read a large book and dreamily consider the pale-blue heat of the water.

Anchoring at Aden, two days later, the ship attracted a swarm of boats from which Somali negroes, their curly manes bleached lion-colored by sun and brine, dove barking after coins, and shrill Armenians or Jews flung up everywhere fore and aft each his line to convey his trolley-basket of ostrich plumes. The girl stood watching their hubbub with delight, when she happened to see the khaki backs of the casuals go down the ladder, followed by the bashful young man in gray. Past them a taller Englishman mounted skipping, who suddenly turned to catch him by the arm.

"Hallo! What, you? Old Adam Khor! How are you? Where now?"

Her acquaintance looked back, shaking hands and laughing.

"Three days here," he said, "till the Karachi boat."

"Right!" cried the other. "Good. I'll see you ashore. Keep you out of all prawls and prabbles!"

The tame friend of swallows went down the ladder, and climbed with the soldiers into a whale-boat that pushed off and rowed away, hot sunset pouring after it, oars flashing, the

charred peak and brown land of Aden waiting beyond.

"Beg pardon." A pleasant voice called her by name, doubtfully. "I've letters here and a cable for you, I believe. From your uncle."

The tall Englishman stood before her, very neat, very sunburnt. She thanked him, took the packet he offered, became lost in polite talk; but after a time, doing what she afterward knew for plain curiosity, said:—

"Who was it you met on the ladder? A mild young man, rather clerical."

"Oh?" The sunburnt messenger pondered, then broke out laughing. "Do you mean Morgan? Why, he's a terror. A little terrier from Wild Wales. He's Adam Khor, the Cannibal, the Eater of Men."

II.

FROM Aden by sea to Karachi, thence by land, Captain Morgan went his quiet way, more observing than observed. In a crowd anywhere he would go as a plain young man, remarkable only for neatness, good carriage, a calm look, short speech, and a friendly smile. Of his

work you would never hear, from him; of the post in northwestern India to which he now travelled he once gave a laborious description.

"It was much like a club," he said, "or a chummery. Yes, quite like, in a way. Chaps came and went."

That was all, the best Morgan could do. He had in mind a station of Frontier Police. What he labored to say, was, that he and his little community of white officers, Pathan troopers, and horses, all hard-working together, lived in a come and go which they took as matter of course. One day you missed a man, and wondered if he were gone, and how long. Later, running across him again; you were not sure.

"Been away?"

"A week."

"Raiders?" On *chigha?*

"No. Rifle-stealing."

"What luck?"

"Rotten."

Behind the station glared a wide river bed, in summer all flats and sand-bars among which there stagnated what was left of Indus water. Before the station, a hot brown plain reached off two or three miles in the same direction with

deadly outpouring excess of light, toward rocky foothills and dismal, gaunt, seared mountains. Up somewhere among these, an imaginary line cranking in and out, ran that unseen, artificial, but always real and troublesome thing called the Border.

"Across it, Waziristan," said Morgan. "Craggs and jags, ravines, hiding-holes, good cliffs for snipers, a puzzle of black mountains. A slag heap and a dust bin: full of Waziris who don't give a dump for your imaginary line, a King-Emperor down south, or an Amir up north. You know the breed. Fighting each other and everybody else. Robbery, riot, and murder before breakfast. You know 'em. A Semitic-looking crowd they are, but hard as nails, funny jokers."

It was after dinner one night that Morgan began his own knowledge of them. At mess, along with the coffee, there came in an orderly bringing a written telephonic message to the colonel, who read it, refused a lump of sugar, folded the form, slid it along to the adjutant, stroked his blunt gray moustache, uttered three or four words meanwhile, nodded, and looked up quickly from this interruption to catch the

point of whatever yarn was being told. The colonel had no yarns himself, but made a good listener always. Through the smoke and talk, Morgan met the adjutant's eye consulting him. A moment later as the mess began to break up, he and the adjutant stood finishing their cigarettes together.

"Your name's next on the roster, Morgan?"

"Yes."

"This is for you, then."

Morgan read the message. Dated that evening, from their next neighbor a station fifty miles away, it ran:—

"Armed party Waziris estimated 75 men reported this afternoon proceeding South, supposed intention crossing river toward Gawandwali."

Morgan thought it over.

"Right," he said.

"Who's with you?" asked the adjutant.

"Afzal Khan. Half a troop's enough."

"Take more if you'd rather."

"Thanks. Can-do, I think."

"Well, good luck to you."

Soon afterward Morgan was following a servant's lantern through the darkness. He

had collected on the way his revolver, sword, and water bottle. At the "lines," by the light of a quickly gathering feast of more lanterns, he collected his half troop,—quiet brown *sowars* in khaki who lined up with an air, face after face, of men well pleased. Being a new-comer to the station, and always (or so his friends thought) a bit of a stickler, Morgan spent some time among the horses' legs, then among the riders themselves, to make sure that each had spurs, carbine, bandoleer, curved tulwar, full water-bottle, haversack, a string net bulging with chopped straw, a bag of mixed feed. Afzal Khan, the bearded *jemadar*, followed him like a watching shadow. Then they were off. The station lamps withdrew behind them, and across the river, sank into the ground.

It was a dark night. All that afternoon dust clouds had banked the sky with a cover of smoky red, obscure like doomsday. Now there were no stars, no landmarks, and in the gritty parched air not so much as a drift or current prevailing toward any one direction. Morgan heard the horses' hoofs crunch behind him, and steered their course by his night compass.

This march, his first turn of duty here alone, gave him no inspiration at the start, but a great fear of losing the way, losing time, and coming home like a fool. Here at his back rode Pathans who trusted him now but would judge later. He led them into the dark, into nothing, on the track of a "supposed intention", an enemy who had the whole countryside to choose from, plain, foot-hill, canal path, field, known road or unknown by-way.

Half an hour had passed thus, in anxiety, when on the left hand far ahead something gathered and began to glow like a stormy moonrise. Morgan watched it as he rode, then turned his horse's head toward it.

"No moon this week."

The glow became a dusty-red glare on the sky.

"Village burning."

He turned his head, passed back a word which Afzal Khan's voice repeated, and heard the hoof-beats behind him change and quicken.

"What luck," he thought, with a sudden admiring love of his fellow workers. "Good scouts. It's Gawandwali on fire. Information A-1."

They came at last galloping into the conflagration.

III.

THE mud walls of the town appeared as a black disorderly band joining house to house in silhouette, under a cloud of smoke, flame, and sparks. Inside, the street where Morgan halted his men shone with red light, rang with the wailing of women, and was full of shadowy figures who ran helter-skelter shouting confused orders to one another as they fought the fire. Other shadows lay still in the road. By the time Captain Morgan had flung himself off his mare, these alone remained, and with eyes accustomed to the glow he saw them as white cloth bundles from which sprawled arms and legs. The living shadows had vanished, and the wailing and shouting broken off at once, the crackle of burning houses risen quietly triumphant in a stillness of death. Empty smoke drifted where the crowds had been running, and a sour steam of charred wood half quenched in water.

Morgan guessed why the villagers had fled.

Catching at one last shadow that limped by him against the wall, he pulled out into the firelight a native with dirt and drying blood caked all over his face.

"Wait," said Morgan. "We are not the raiders again. We are the Sarkar."

His captive, trembling, saw that he spoke the truth. Here was no wild highlander, but a trim sahib belted and spurred, calm, erect, wearing the sword of the law at his thigh, the khaki uniform and helmet, and polished riding-boots that glistened like glass.

"Go bring me your *lambardar* and *moulvi*."

The blood-smeared creature lost his fright, and ran off shouting good news. A moment later from doorways, hiding-holes, tumbled caverns under burnt beams, the villagers came pouring out like rats. They returned to surround Morgan with a hubbub.

"*Jemadar*," said he, "keep them back."

Afzal Khan took four *sowars*, and in a few moments, with few words, had order in that burning street.

"Go put out your fire," called Morgan. Two old men, the village chief and the priest, re-

mained salaaming in his presence. He greeted them quietly.

"Who did this?"

"Waziri devils did it, sahib," replied the headman. "We fought. They carried off women and goods. They killed more than ten of us. We killed only one."

"How long ago?"

With doubt, after much consultation, the two elders agreed that it was an hour and more since the burners had ended their slaying and gone.

The young sahib took this report, it seemed, with great calm. As a matter of fact he was thinking quickly, and damning his luck. The raiders, with their hills less than ten miles northward, and a start of an hour, were clean away, safe.

"*Jemadar*, get the fires put out."

He turned to the headman again.

"Let me see the one you killed."

The women had resumed their lament, some wailing indoors, others in the street crouched beside this or that bundle of cloth. Round something at the foot of a wall, idlers crowded, whom a *sowar*, like a dog herding sheep, pres-

ently drove off to fight fire. What they had been trampling and gaping over, was the dead Waziri. Headman, priest, and officer looked down at the body in silence for a time.

"We fought," the headman repeated. "But how could we fight, sahib?"

Morgan gave a nod. He understood. Taken by surprise, half awake, armed only with clubs and a few rusty curios of weapons, the villagers had done what they could against rough and ready murderers who let off Lee-Metfords into them at close range.

"A woman having been taken," said the little old weazened *moulvi*, "her husband fought for her. They shot him. But while dying he rose like a lion, and took this one by the leg, and slew him."

The dead ruffian, a youth with wild locks and ferocious brown face, lay staring up at them, his mouth open, lips curled as if to bite. He looked younger even than Morgan. The ruddy light flickered across him, moved shadows of cheekbone and of hooked nose like almost living passion at play, and revealed on his chin a great black-haired mole.

"Her husband, dying," said the headman, "killed him with his own knife."

"Ugly customer," thought Morgan.

He would have disliked the face alive. Being dead, it seemed yet worse. That mole gave it a sinister burlesque touch, as though some born devil without mercy had stuck on a dab of clown's beard for humorous disguise.

"Does anyone know him?"

The two old men thought not.

Morgan reflected. The scowling face might be his only help here. It was not much; but he was not going home beaten, yet.

"Take good care of this," he ordered. "We shall consider it again by daylight."

He moved on to see how his firemen were doing their duty.

IV

"FIRST thing next morning," said Morgan afterward, "we got the dead man lying in state on a *charpai* outdoors, then had the entire village line up and march past. Not a soul knew him, or had ever seen him before last night. It was not a face you'd readily forget."

The captain gave something between a shrug and shiver. He continued to abridge his narrative.

"We went out from there to the next village, carrying our *charpai* covered with a sheet. Nothing else to do. Keep on till we found a place that did know him."

It was a hot journey, monotonous, every stage like the stage before. Over bare brown earth the troopers rode in a cloud of dust. Now they halted at some green patch of half-starved maize, a hovel or so, and a bamboo sweep that tilted wearily up and down all day, one end weighted with a clump of mud, the other with a dripping jar of canal water. Again they paused under a magnificent old tree, where in heavenly shade a buffalo, hooded with leather cups over his eyes to prevent dizziness, walked round and round his windlass, a male baby chasing the monster, and a Persian wheel creaking overhead as it revolved its endless chain of earthen pots, rose-red or mottled green, all glittering from the well. Then out into sun, heat, and dust cloud the *sowars* followed their captain, breathing grit and pounding the brick-like earth again. Whenever they reached an-

other village, another huddle of flat roofs and parapets behind mud walls, they drew a cordon round it, to let no one out while Morgan, the *jemadar*, and the dead man with his bearers entered at the chief gate and summoned the elders.

"Set him down here in the bazaar," said Morgan. "Turn back the sheet. Uncover his face. Line them up. March them past."

So the young bandit lay scowling while strangers by the hundred, men, women, and children, brushed along his cot and murmured at him.

It was always the same thing, Morgan found: each place alike, each crowd, each failure.

"Of course we watched their faces jolly close, but nobody knew our gentleman. One came to feel like a travelling showman gone broke, or like the chap in *De Omnibus*, 'a poor escaped waxwork.' Beastly."

Every village contained the tomb of its own saint, Pir This, Pir That, with a tree or a bamboo stake where tatters of colored rag fluttered over the holy ground. Now and then a saint, being superior, had grown longer since burial.

"That was all the difference we saw. A nine-foot saint, a ten footer, or a twelve. The rest was always the same. And we always failed."

On the evening of the third day, Morgan came to the end of his hope. It was no longer possible, in such blistering hot weather, to carry the evidence about: that sheeted form was demanding burial. Once underground, it would keep its secret for ever. Here the one thread snapped, their search broke off.

He sat in a mud hovel acknowledging defeat, when a shadow darkened the opening and waited. He recognized the puttees and brown leather boots of his *jemadar*.

"Come in," he called.

Afzal Khan bent under the doorway, entered, and stood before him, a bright-eyed, black-bearded man of war, straight and tough as lancewood.

"Sahib, I have thought what we can do."

"What is that?"

"There are four villages we have not gone to."

"Yes."

"If we put this man underground, it is finished."

"True."

"Then let us take off his head, sahib, put it in *sharop* to keep, and carry it to those four villages."

Afzal Khan's bright eyes questioned his master, hopefully. He smiled the quiet smile of one who disclaims any brilliancy of idea, knowing it to be plain common sense. Morgan looked at him as though unmoved.

"Hmm. Well.—Wait a bit. Go outside, and I'll call you in a moment."

The *jemadar* turned, stooped, and disappeared into the sunset gilding the dust without. Even had he stayed, he would never have guessed what his words were doing, or why his captain sat motionless. A hard old loyal Pathan, he had tried, with his experience of hunting vermin, to help a new young officer whom he liked.

"This is gruesome."

It was plain to Morgan that he must decide quickly. His feelings—the feelings of an ordinary well bred youth now confronted with a grim extraordinary fact—rose in revolt. Morgan put them down. Here was no time for his own feelings. He came to carry out a mission,

to help his willing men earn their salt, to arrest robbers and murderers. Judgment was not easy; but he remembered a poor wretch of a husband who had risen to die like a lion, and some unknown women who were at this moment suffering in the hills; and so, jumping up, Morgan walked to the door, and beckoned his *jemadar*.

"Come here," he called; and then found he could not give such a grisly order. "This thing—"

"It is done, *captan* sahib."

Morgan stared.

"I did not tell you—" he began.

"Then I misunderstood," replied Afzal Khan. "My fault, sahib, *Gram yan*."

The gleam in the man's eye was hard to read. It did not spell dullness or misunderstanding.

"We shall not speak of faults. It is too late," said Morgan. "Your deed is now my deed." To himself he thought:—"Here begins trouble."

"Well, *captan* sahib, this thing being done," reasoned his helper, "I will go buy a jar."

During the time that followed, Morgan

could not tell which was worse:—by daylight to stand while another village moved past, and see a dripping head held aloft by its lank uncurled back hair; or by night to lie in his tent, and to know what was floating inside a brown jar of native wine that bulged in the opposite corner.

“Ghoulish either way,” said Morgan. “The dab of beard on the chin, and all that. In your sleep you saw the thing rise out of the jar and begin bukking away. Wet cheeks, you know, and stiff lips. It seemed a long affair. It wasn’t, really. But either way you felt a bit of a ghoul.”

V.

AT NOON, in the last crowded village, by the dry pebbles of what had been a ford, Afzal Khan was holding the head up in air, watching faces, when a woman dropped and grovelled.

“*Ahi, ahi!*” She pulled over her own head a dirty cloth, raked up dust to throw on it, and howled. “My son, my son!”

At least they had found the raider’s mother. She was a little old woman, gaunt and spidery,

in cotton wrappings that no amount of dust could soil much more. Her grief halted the moving line.

"To see her, made us think we were the murderers in it," said Morgan. "She seemed a most pitiful old widow. About forty years of age, I suppose, but you know what that means: they always look well over eighty. The *sowars* kept the crowd away. We got her into the headman's *jamma*, talked with her privately, and gave her what loose silver a chap carries, which is not much. It sounds uncharitable, the head being the head of her only son, but it's true: the old body tied her rupees away in a rag, chinked them, was consoled, and would gladly have marketed a few more children if she'd had more. This is a horrid yarn. I can't help it. The point is, nobody cared a hang. Not the mother. Not any one but this lone lorn white man, rather nauseated. A life more or less means nothing to a Waziri, not even his own. Incurably light-hearted."

A week before, it appeared, she and her son had been at home together one evening, when there came a knock at their door. The son opened it and let in one Asgar Ali, a well known

border character with a curly beard and a gentle smile. The two men talked. Then they went outdoors together, and that was the last the widow knew until she, like Morgan in his night thoughts, beheld a gaping head rise wet with toddy from a jar.

"We got Asgar Ali. We got him, and most of his gang. They came back down-hill with us to the station, later had a fair trial before the Deputy Commissioner, and were shipped off to the Andamans, out of 'arm's way. The stolen women we took home, poor girls. A queer procession they made."

Thus the affair would have seemed to end. Morgan, content to have his name at the foot of the roster, his report accepted, and his brief turn of rest fallen due, said nothing more. There were the usual hails in passing.

"Been away?"

"Yes."

"What was up?"

"Oh, hunting the festive *shaitan*."

"Any luck?"

"Fair."

The colonel gave him a nod at mess, like one who remembered having seen such a face

there before. That was the colonel's manner, his habit: he never appeared to know or care what went on, unless it went wrong, when he immediately roused and with an air of intense weariness, growling under his blunt moustache, demanded:—"Who in Hades did that?" The doer seldom enjoyed answering.

Many weeks had passed, and Morgan, with many other things to think about, had forgotten this expedition of his, when at breakfast an orderly brought in a message. The colonel wished to see Captain Morgan at once.

A punkah swayed lazily over the colonel's desk, like a loose flap of sail in a sleepy breeze. Three or four paper slips, weighted by a bright burnished horse-shoe, fluttered rhythmically. Near them stood a photograph in an oval silver frame. The colonel's room, clean, bare, was always quiet to the point of drowsiness; the colonel himself, to-day, looked wide awake, but gloomy.

"Mornin', Morgan."

The young man clicked his heels, and stood ready.

"I believe it was you," grunted the colonel, "who caught Asgar Ali."

"Yes, sir," replied Morgan.

"Damn it," said the colonel.

For a time the punkah waved back and forth, with a gentle purr of its thong rubbing over the iron hook in the ceiling.

"Damn it," said the colonel again.

Morgan prepared himself for the worst. Whatever that might be, it was in no hurry to come.

"You did well," declared his chief suddenly.

This incredible song of praise overcame the youngster. He could not believe his ears, though they were flushing warm.

"But—"

The colonel pushed away the silver oval of the photograph, and raised his bright horse-shoe, from under which he drew the fluttering strips of newspaper.

"Have you seen these?"

"No, sir."

"Look 'em over."

The last cutting which Morgan read was a fair sample of them all.

"A CASE FOR INQUIRY.

"SEVERAL letters have reached us giving further particulars of the mutilation perpetrated on the dead

body of a Musalman at Gawandwali last month. The main facts are as follows. The man, a poor but well known member of the Musalman community, was killed during a street riot at which he had the misfortune to be present. We are informed that a police officer, whose name is known to the authorities, gave order that the body of this unfortunate man should be decapitated, and after plunging the severed head into wine or spirits, exposed it repeatedly to public view, even before the eyes of sorrowing relatives. Without attempt to analyze the motive or motives for such brutal mockery as the last mentioned, it is now asked how it comes about that Musalmans after death are subjected by official order to contact with wine, which according to their creed is unspeakable pollution? Was the outrage committed by some young subaltern after dinner? Are the souls of unbefriended Musalmans to be thus capriciously defiled for all eternity? The native press teems with these and other questions. . . ."

Morgan replaced the papers on the desk, and looked up.

"Well?" said his colonel. "How much of that Eurasian style is true?"

Words came slowly to Morgan. He could not understand this attack.

"Why, sir, nobody cared," he answered. "No one but me, that is. The local *malik* didn't. Not even the chap's mother."

Bang went the colonel's horse-shoe on the desk.

"I'll tell you how much is true," said the colonel. "Four words. 'The native press teems.' Remember that. The press always teems. Now look here."

Morgan saw kindly anger in the blue eyes which held his own.

"You're not a politician." The colonel came near to smiling, but avoided that fault, and wound his blunt gray moustache like the stem of a watch. "Nor am I. If you're in the habit of thanking God, an eligible opportunity now offers. But look here. As I told you, the press teems. There is just now in politics a gentleman who sits up all night hearkening to cries let off by the down-trodden. Don't ever quote me, Morgan. He may be all right, but if so, he has a leg like a lazy-tongs for pulling. Now here."

The colonel bent forward and let his voice drop to a rumble.

"This morning I had unofficial word," he continued, "that the Protector of the Poor can't sleep for your abominable sacrilege, young man: howls of the lost in his ears night and day.

Being a political gentleman, he loves his dear people. Head for head. He'll chop off yours. If you go saddle your mare now, you can catch a train for Simla and get your story into the ears of the Commander-in-Chief,—just what did happen. Good-bye."

Morgan hesitated.

"I don't like to run away, sir."

The colonel shoved his chair back.

"My boy," he said, "to-morrow I may hear officially, and then it would be my duty to keep you. Arrest, eh? Do you want to be dismissed the service? Get out. Run. Manage to have the C.-in-C. hear your story, straight, full. Saddle that damn piebald mare, and go. Or stay to argue religion if you prefer. It's your career, not mine."

Morgan acknowledged the wisdom of this world.

"Thank you, sir," he began; then stopped as though hit between the eyes. From the oval silver frame, pictured as he always remembered her, that girl who had dazzled him in the Red Sea looked straight up with friendly but disconcerting humor.

"Move out," said the colonel. "Good-bye. Saddle your *wospa*. Good luck."

VI.

THE journey by train was doleful. Mile after mile, alone in his compartment, Morgan went rattling on toward a new, formidable world. To go up and beard a Commander-in-Chief, was a job that flustered him; to advance his own affairs, by talk, a form of sport he loathed; and to find himself embroiled in both at once——

"I'd rather go tackle the Old Man of the Mountain," he thought, "blow my horn and brag before him and all the Assassins. What a mission! Humiliating."

Two facts kept him steady: he could not bear a hint of dismissal from the service, let alone disgrace; and though no one had mentioned any such duty, he must back up that man of little speech, his colonel.

Through pines and rhododendrons he mounted, next day, to Simla, bewildered by greenery and cool air, two luxuries he had forgotten. On the Mall he felt exceeding *jungli*,

a country bumpkin dropped into great fashionable traffic. He was more alone than ever in these crowds. But from the club he went, as in duty bound, to write his name in the visitors' book at the Viceregal Lodge.

While he was writing, a door opened, and there drifted in a highly polished young civilian aide, one of the "Heaven-Born", rather pale, rather bald, who looked across at him and smiled.

"Why, Adam Khor as I live. Good morning, Man-Eater!"

The Captain started, hearing his outdoor nickname so readily shot off by an indoor stranger. Then he started again, for this languid one was quoting a boyhood joke, something dug up against him by a bookworm at school, ages past.

"That arch heretic was called Pelagius, *â Pelago*, his name being Morgan," drawled the aide, and with a most unofficial grin, began to shake hands. "How are you, Pelly?"

"Good heaven," said Morgan, "you're not Arthur Gresly. Where's the hair gone?"

Mr. Gresly went on shaking hands.

"Years," he said. "Grief. Hallooing and

singing of anthems. But really, are you this Morgan, The Morgan, with whom all Asia rings from side to side? Hair? You don't look a day older—or wiser. What can I do for you?"

Here was a schoolmate who had gone aloft in the world. Morgan stammered before him.

"I only want—I have to go see the Commander-in-Chief."

"Is that all, my babe in the wood?" Arthur Gresley drew out a large conservative gold watch, looked on the dial with placid eye, and remarked:—"Don't do it, then. I've a better idea. Be on hand, here, at quarter before one o'clock, and you shall eat of the viceregal lunch. To the sound of shawms and cornets. But Pelly—"

A red-coated servant appeared at his elbow, salaamed, and offered a document.

"Oh, the devil," murmured Gresley. "Just as we begin to talk. Never mind. I'll arrange it. Come to lunch. Without fail, now."

In a short though varied life Morgan had already eaten bad food, but never did he make so wretched a meal as on that noon, at a great man's table. His appetite was a hollow fraud,

poorly enacted. Strangers on either hand found him dull, gave him up, and talked easily past him of unknown matters. He sat there an ignorant lump; and later, being withdrawn to a window apart, he came before his host awkwardly, heavily, a man with an axe to grind.

"Ah, yes, jugged head," said the Viceroy. "How did it come inside your jar, Captain Morgan?"

Morgan faced his judge. He told the facts badly, but in less time than a man takes to cook an egg.

"It's unfortunate," said his hearer. "The press is keeping such an uproar about you. Will you wait till you hear from me?"

Morgan returned to the club that afternoon, and passed twenty-four gloomy hours there. By night, in the corner of his bedroom, from the dream of a brown earthenware belly came wavering upward the dream of a face to reproach him, a haggard phosphorescent face with a disk of beard on the chin. Its lips, drawn upward in a frozen bite, moved. It gave a groan: "You are sacked. You have dishonored your colonel"—and went down splashing in a mist. By day, he avoided his

fellow men, like one who had done sacrilege, and was pointed at.

The sun had left Annandale, and begun to set, when he walked alone up a shady winding track, where gay creatures from a pic-nic rode by him laughing, without care. Morgan halted, waited to give their horses a long lead, then climbed slowly after. His own kind, being happy, seemed foreign. Twilight overtook him, a twilight among evergreens pierced by rays of dusty gold. Another band of laughers cantered by, then more, and then the road grew still.

Coming sadly round a bend, later, he overtook a dapple gray horse that gazed back at him and held up one forefoot in a young woman's lap. The pair were in trouble.

"Can I help you?" said Morgan.

"Oh, will you please? He's gone lame, and I can't budge it."

The woman spoke without looking up. Over her shoulder Morgan saw the frog of the hoof and a pebble wedged there. He carried always in his pocket a good stag-horn knife with a farrier's hook.

"Wait." Stooping, he jerked the pebble out, then patted the gray. "All clear."

He rose, to be thanked by the girl of the Red Sea and of his colonel's desk. The last light burning through green leaves, they saw each other as before, in common surprise; but a noise of horses and riders descended on them, parted them, a cavalcade of merrymakers who had missed her and come back down-hill. They laughed and called out; they all knew one another, these care-free beings; and their young men buzzed round her. She was in saddle, away, up the woods, yet not without a look and a private farewell:—

"Thanks again, Captain Morgan. You'll hear good news."

Uncertain that he had caught the words right, he climbed on, gained the top, and entered the Mall, the evening crowd there. She had known his name: but everybody no doubt knew such a public fool, even if he slunk along on foot.

In the club that night Arthur Gresly appeared, hunting him down.

"Hallo! Here you are," cried the Heaven-

Born, and hauled him into a corner of the billiard room. "Come sit. Cast your eye on this."

It was fourteen pages of type-writing which his old schoolmate laid before him.

"The report against you. It arrived yesterday morning."

Morgan turned the leaves in despair, without trying to read. He looked up from them, over the lamp-lighted tables of green cloth, and down again.

"Like the King in Huckleberry Finn," said Gresly, "you ain't done nothing and they're chasing you for it."

"Arthur," said Morgan, "I can't understand how you follow such a stinking livelihood. Politics."

The man of the pen merely grinned at the man of the sword.

"Read my chief's endorsement," he urged. "It's worth a glance, his reply."

Morgan turned the mass of pages over, and saw, in a clear but impatient running hand, the written judgment of a viceroy:—

"I consider that this officer, Captain Morgan, acted under trying circumstances in accordance with his best judgment, which had for result the capture and con-

viction of criminals. Captain Morgan will return to his post."

The sunburnt reader lifted his head.

"Arthur," said he, "I take it all back."

The bald young aide jumped on foot, and beckoned a native in livery.

"We have time," he announced, "for one drink and one game of billiards before dinner, you godless bloody-minded scapegoat."

Morgan said no more until, after sherry and bitters, they were chalking their cues.

"It's a pleasure to work with men who don't talk," he reflected. "It is, Arthur, I assure you. Like your chief, and my colonel, and Afzal Khan."

His friend laughed.

"Tush. Here's a game that hath no relish of salvation in it. Politics and religion barred. Your break."

But Morgan delayed the opening of their game. He, too, could be a man of little speech. He stood and wondered how a girl could tell a soldier's fortune.

PART TWO
MIRIAM BIBI

PART II.

MIRIAM BIBI

To his post as a viceroy bade him, Captain Morgan returned on the next day, rushing down the cart road from Simla to Kalka behind wild ponies that galloped on the edge of woodland precipices to the musical clanging of tonga chains. Green forest shadow, mountain sunlight, air made sweet by pine and laurel, poured in his face like one exhilarating breath for curve after curve, mile after mile downward. Morgan drank delight while it lasted: there would be nothing of this kind on the plains or on his own frontier. Mingled with the descent were two gay thoughts for company.

"Your colonel will be all right now," ran one, which looked forward. The other reached

back. "You saw her again. She knew your name and told your fortune."

Tonga chains and ponies' hoofs beat out something which in a daydream he began whistling, and woke to recognize as the Girl He Left Behind Him.

"No, you've not," Morgan objected. He could see her face quite clearly, full of fun, good sense, liveliness; and while his mind's eye dwelt on this friendly phantom, some other irrational part of him registered a vow. "You're going to meet her, in time, somewhere ahead. The world's wide and all that, but never mind. You're going to."

Later, in the train, alone in a hot compartment, he regarded favorably his good staghorn knife with the farrier's hook.

"Lucky old tool," he thought. "And why didn't we save our blessed pebble?"

This folly was, perhaps, an effect of mountain air. The heat down here smothered it out. An hour or two beyond Umballa, rousing from a doze, Morgan felt sure that he had ruminated nonsense,—great nonsense for a man just clear of one trouble by a narrow shave, and

ordered back into more, no doubt, into plenty of hard work.

"To chase the grinning *shaitan*, at one hundred and ten degrees in the shade," he reflected. "That's your job. Not to squire damsels on a hill pic-nic. Come out of the poetry, son."

His piebald mare Echo greeted him at the journey's end. They were glad to see each other. The colonel gave him a nod and a gruff word or two. He slipped so quietly back into routine that after a few days he could have thought there had been no break, no absence or change. Morgan's fellows came and went as before, and soon, his name heading the roster again, he too rode off with his handful of Pathan troopers. The same old glare of sand and gravel, the same fierce heat boiling up in mirage, the same barren ground tired and mocked his eyes with monotony,—a treacherous monotony, where every fold or seam or shadowed line might be the edge of a dry watercourse, and screen a whole tribe of murderers passing freely along its tortuous bed. This land always contained more than met your sight.

The captain's work swallowed him thus. In

the saddle by day, in his tent at night, he worked through one or another problem, sometimes beaten, sometimes moderately successful. A village intrigue, the truth or falsehood of a rumor, some little snake-in-the-grass motive hidden through long, long conversation, a riddle of topography, a quick silent conflict of wits, a guess at what unknown persons would do; these or like matters employed him, often to no apparent advantage, often to the limit of boredom, relieved perhaps by a spatter of bullets from a blank-faced rock in a gorge that, when taken, harbored no one.

"Not good sniping," said Morgan, after another of these little disappointments.

"No, sahib," replied Afzal Khan, beside him. "Not good. But the man will go on trying,—burning powder."

"What man?"

The *jemadar* laughed silently, with a flash of teeth in his curly black beard, while his keen eyes distrusted every boulder up the ravine, and hunted along the sky-line.

"Gulab Din."

"Ah?" said Morgan. "Who is Gulab Din?"
The native officer continued to watch.

"Asgar Ali's brother," he replied, as from a distance. "The brother of the raider whom you caught. It is you he aims at. His family and mine are neighbors. He means to kill you, sahib."

Along with the words, and another pop of the rifle softened by distance, a bullet struck the crumbling rocky soil just overhead like one thump on a drum.

"Nearer, that time."

Both men moved behind the corner of a crag. The sniper, firing down hill, had overshoot them by the usual error; he left no smoke in the air to betray him; and therefore, his target knew, he carried a good stolen rifle with proper ammunition.

"He goes," murmured Afzal Khan, pointing. "There."

High in the point of the ravine, down which flooded the western sun to baffle their sight, they detected an almost imperceptible movement. Little scabs of dark evergreen freckled the upper hillside. Among scores of them, one changed its outline by a hairs-breadth. Near at hand, a *sowar* lying prone on the hot rocks, as though dead, suddenly fired his carbine. A

puff of dust whitened and faded, below that evergreen ball, while the noise tore a long strip of echo up the gorge. Morgan saw nothing move afterward, but his companion spoke at once.

"No. He has gone. I saw the rim of his head sink over the hill. Gulab Din has finished for the day. He runs home up Zulfikar's Tangai, then through the Snake's Belly, where a man must go sideways in the dark, then mount his pony at the bottom of the Boiler, and—*höa, bo!* He is quick, *captan* sahib. No fool, Gulab Din."

The speaker smiled with vicarious enjoyment, if not admiration. Morgan, glancing at him, nodded in sympathy. They were friends; he could trust Afzal Khan, could give his life or even his honor into the man's keeping; and yet the tawny, hook-nosed *jemadar* remained at heart, as by birth, a Pathan from over the border who knew all secret ways and liked a good enemy that used them to escape. It was right, it was well. This outlaw would be true while eating the bread and salt of the Law, but not a moment more.

"What profit to Gulab Din," asked Morgan, "if he kill me? Another will do my work."

The Pathan laughed silently.

"No," he replied. "Another, but not so good. Our people call you Adam Khor, the man-eater. Already. They are afraid, because you are young, sahib."

Here was an old nickname following him; but it did not surprise Morgan, for nicknames of every kind had clung to him since boyhood, changing a little now and then.

"Afraid of what?"

Afzal Khan looked him in the eye.

"They fear. You are young, and growing. Therefore it is better to kill you now. They fear you will be like Button Sahib, down below, who came, and took here a man, or there a man, and behold, that man would never be seen again on earth."

It was too hot for blushing, or Morgan might have blushed. He felt silly, to be compared with Button Sahib, the great Warburton.

"No man," he retorted, "ever disappeared who was not a *budmash*, an evil-doer."

"We," answered his friend, calmly, "are all

budmash. Gulab Din or another will kill you, sahib, so that you may never grow up."

The old border rascal grinned like a father warning a son of tricks in this naughty world. It was time to recall discipline.

"Bring in your men," said Morgan. "Fall them in. March them up to the old *chaman*, and camp."

"Good, sahib."

One fact as days passed grew evident: not only the *jemadar's* paternal manner at times, but the behavior of all the troopers, gave their captain a most welcome assurance. They were with him, quietly but surely, in the bond of good will. Things moved like clockwork. Men tired by long duty, jumped at the chance of more as though it were sport; and even during slack moments when this or that affair had gone dull, their eyes waited to catch Morgan's with expectancy, an amusing readiness, a spirit of "What Next?" They seemed like so many favorite dogs being taken for a walk, enlivening it, as a good observer has remarked, by their knowledge that something delightful is always round the corner. These were terriers in a

land of rats. Morgan enjoyed their company, and felt a little honest pride.

One day something did wait round the corner. In the cool of early morning, they rode up a narrow trail, a ledge where sharp-pointed rubble made every hoof step gingerly. Below the right hand slanted a precipice like the tailings from a giant rock-crusher, dotted with round heads of evergreen scrub; on the left rose a crumbling wall that dammed the downpour of shale and evergreen from high above. The shelf, up which the horses climbed in single file, bent round a nose of black rock.

Morgan, riding foremost, halted before the turn, to breathe his piebald mare. It was not yet day in the pass, but bluish twilight. As he waited, there came to his nostrils a whiff that seemed foreign to the mountain air. A faint burnt smell, it reminded him of Chinese fireworks.

Morgan raised his head and sniffed. The odor was gone; elsewhere a trifle, up here in these hills it was worth attention, quick and close heed; and therefore he waited, uplifting a wet finger, then eyeing that black rock ahead, from which a hint of draught came.

Once more the fragrance passed, lazily.

Morgan looked back. His troopers, one below another in the path, were leaning out from their saddles, each brown face intent, watching him. He gave them a sign with his hand.

"Ready!" it said.

He knew the smell now, and remembered how the chief's son of Nagar was murdered. Round the bend, hidden, a matchlock was burning.

The captain slid from his mare, ran the looped thong of his revolver up his wrist, beckoned the nearest men, and quietly climbed the side wall above the ledge. Instead of rounding the little promontory nose, he would crawl over its bridge, and take this ambush in the rear.

"*Dekho!*" cried a voice.

As he rose to his feet, on the top, a watcher bounced from the scrub, flew at him with a *chore*, the hillman's long straight knife, but tripped on the shale and fell. Morgan shot him, and jumped over his turban in the dust.

Ten feet down, where the ledge widened, a knot of crouching figures beneath the black rock leaped asunder, upright, with yells. A

tall hook-nosed man, his beard stained bright purple, his face all agrin with the joy of combat, raised a pistol in each hand, and fired. Morgan replied. At the same time spurs jingled beside him, loose rock rattled, three or four troopers began to empty their carbines, and the ledge lay bare. Down the slope, running, rolling, sliding head-first, bounding over green scrub, went the Waziris.

"Like a dozen dirty old tennis balls, you know, spilled on the stairs," Morgan said afterward.

His left hand was wet. He found, with surprise, that it ran red, and that a bullet had torn his sleeve.

Far down the ravine, the fugitives were mounting ponies that looked no larger than sheep, and galloping breakneck where it seemed that a man could hardly climb. One pony ran loose after them. One rider had something doubled over his saddle-bow, like a sack, from which a pair of arms dangled. They all vanished among dark crags and blue twilight with a whoop of laughter.

Morgan wiped the blood from his watch. The affair had lasted one minute and a quarter.

It left him nothing but a scratch on the forearm; in the path below, a very ancient pistol with its match still fuming, and blood on the butt; and alongside him, a wounded prisoner, the young man whom he had shot, a nuisance to be doctored, carried along, tenderly treated.

"Who was the big chap with his beard colored like a peacock?"

"He," replied Afzal Khan. "Himself. Gulab Din."

"Ah?" said Morgan. "We have barked each other's knuckles, then."

The *jemadar* nodded at their captive, who was now sitting up, more dazed than hurt.

"This," he declared, "is Gulab Din's nephew. I think, sahib, you have won the first *chukker* in the game."

His tone, his look, signified that play had only begun. When, far below where a notch cut a vista, sunrise reddened the edge of the gray plains, Morgan's troop rode on their interrupted mission. The captain, handling his enemy's pistol, pinched out the spark from the match, and smiled to find that his own blood had mingled with the spatter of Gulab Din's on the butt. He would keep this antique

weapon for souvenir. On the whole, it seemed rather pleasant to adopt the custom of the country, and have a private feud, fun by the way, a side-show that lent gayety. So his thought ran at the time, as the horses went climbing the ledge, and their shadows, born suddenly, darted long up hill in a morose fiery glow which was day.

Two nights later, he had reason to doubt the fun of this quarrel.

Their camp stood on a platform of living rock, which before darkness came had overlooked heights and deeps, bent ridges, crooked valleys, a wallow of bleak sinuosity. Now nothing remained but starlight. They were homeward bound to-morrow, having done their errand. Morgan, just returned from a round of the sentries, halted before his tent, which glimmered gray as a rock, for neither inside nor anywhere on the platform was there a light. The hills might be silent, but he would provide no lamp unto the feet of any wandering sniper.

"Too hot for bed, yet," he considered.

The stars were magnificent. They and the

silence made a kind of everlasting dream on this high place.

A voice broke it.

"*Captan* sahib."

Morgan came to earth quickly.

"Yes?"

"There is trouble, sahib." The voice, lowered and anxious, was that of a Pathan, who hovered as a shadow three or four paces away.

"A man sick."

"What man?"

"Fatteh Ali Shah. He rose to drink water. He has fallen, and cannot speak."

In their late skirmish, Fatteh Ali Shah, trooper, had got a scalp wound and been tottery for half an hour, then brisk as ever. Morgan, blaming himself in advance if the man were now ill, moved toward the speaker.

"Where is he, then?"

"This way, sahib," came the reply. "Near the horses."

Morgan followed at once where the shadow led him, past a darker clump which he knew to be the horses, and beyond, till of a sudden he paused. The edge of the rock platform could not be far off. True, their sick man might have

wandered here, but—The captain felt an odd cross-current of suspicion.

“Where is he?”

“Here, sahib,” murmured the voice, eagerly. “He lies here, just before you.”

The doubt passed. It was nonsense. To right and left within call stood a pair of sentries, whom he had visited a moment ago. He moved forward again and overtook the shadow of his guide, who was kneeling or squatting near an object, a blur, the shape of a man on the ground.

Morgan bent toward this. He had time to guess that it was no trooper, when it bounded up and with hard, muscular arms clutched him round both knees, hard hands pinioned him from behind, another pair caught his throat like an iron ring, and something warm, thick, damp, smothered him in a reek of sweaty horse. He tried to call out, but the effort only choked him still more with horse-hairs and lint. While he fought blindly, the arms became rope, cutting him, tying him like a bundle. He felt himself thrown from hand to hand roughly down a steep place.

“Right between my sentries!”

Bitter disgust, the filth of that blanket or saddle-cloth round his head, the drop and tumble down a ladder of straining bodies, ended in a crash, a pain, a sheet of fire.

"They dropped me," he lay thinking, years after. Or was it but next moment? "Who dropped me? What—"

He roused and sat up in the dark, his head aching. If not in camp, not just waked from a dream, he could recall as by obscure glimpses a long continuation of this ache, mingled with other discomfort, some pounding motion, the beat of hoofs, Pathan voices joking, starlight that swam dizzily and rushed away.

Morgan put a hand to his head.

"Wow!—Yes, they dropped me."

Over one ear was a lump, doleful to the touch. He let it alone, and explored elsewhere. They had taken his sword; or no, he remembered leaving that on his bed: but revolver, watch, compass, matches, pipe, all were gone, and his pockets empty.

"*Kala chor!*" he said, aloud, hoping to draw an answer. "Black thief! *Gankappai!*"

No one resented the term. A man snored, not far away, and a quiet breathing of other

sleepers gradually made itself heard. Roundabout the captain felt nothing but a floor of hewn stone, which, as he crawled on hands and knees to explore it, ended in a corner so that his head came sorely against walls. They too were of stone, large blocks, well and truly laid, upholding rougher courses. A little gray oblong shimmered above. Rising to his feet, Morgan saw through this window or loophole a patch of sky, where among lesser lights above a black cloud of hills burned the morning star.

"In safe keeping," he told himself. "They've put you in a tower, very likely."

He sat down again, tried to think, but found his wits were dull, baffled by pain. Time dragged. He could not smoke, could do nothing but wait till the darkness grew thinner, and while wearying of it, drowsed off to sleep.

Light woke him, a wedge of light overhead, sunshine on a ceiling blackened with time and ribbed with old beams.

"Now where are we?"

The headache had passed, leaving no more than a kind of up-all-night giddiness when he stood on foot. One glance about him showed that his conjecture, last night, had been wrong,

for this prison was not one of the many old watch-towers in the hills, but a house, a Pathan dwelling. He had slept in a bare room, now lighted by the early sun striking upward through that loophole; on the floor curled the ropes which had bound him, along with the dirty horse-blanket which he still could taste. A doorless arch in the masonry led to an outer room, where he found nothing but sparse, rude furniture and the ashes of a fire. The only door to the house, a weighty front of iron-bound planks, was locked. Beyond it he heard a murmur of men talking somewhere in the open.

“A good solid jail enough.”

This outer room had two windows, mere bow-slots, from neither of which Morgan could see more than branches and green leaves. Returning to his own loophole at the rear of the house, he looked out there.

“A village!”

By jamming into the embrasure, he could get his head through, with not much to spare. It would have taken drill and crowbar to enlarge this opening, but indeed the captain had at present no thought of escape.

"A village. They carried me all the way home."

Among dull-brown fields parched yet lovely in a sunrise that made each curve rounder with shadow, green foliage and paler green undergrowth of mustard bordered a meandering watercourse and narrowed up into the barren hills like a wavy blade of verdure. Light and darkness mingled in *kikar* leaves; knoll after knoll, though divided by the hidden stream, rose interlocking gently in perspective; and over the tree-tops or across the fields where millet stubble had bleached away, a scattering dozen houses, flat-roofed cubes of stone, watched one another aloof and mistrustful.

"A fertile *wom*," thought Morgan. "Close to a hundred acres."

In rumor he had heard of such a little valley. Afzal Khan might have mentioned it, when talkative. It looked secret, hard to find, this crumpled ribbon of greenery lost under brown rock.

"Too pretty, for cut-throats."

Up and down its length, nothing moved, no man was abroad; but as he leaned watching, he discovered one human figure motionless,

quite near. Below his window the ground fell away, so that the roof of a house basked in the sun at his own level. A girl stood there by the parapet. Slight, rather tall for a Pathan woman, she wore a gray silk robe—Bokhara stuff, no doubt, the loot of a murdered caravan—and on her up-raised forearm carried lightly as for ornament a gray falcon. Sunrise filled the air beyond her with long misty slants of greenish gold.

“Also too pretty for them.”

The girl did not stir. If she were come upon the roof to give her pet an outing, she had forgotten, and become lost in thought. Her graceful attitude was not one of rest, but of uncompleted motion. The sun glistened on her black hair, as on the silk. Girl and hawk, poised at the edge of morning space, might almost have alighted there together, still gray creatures whose next flight could be swift and dangerous.

“Extraordinary,” the captain reflected. He had seen Pathan women before, and never one who called her soul her own. “Hasn’t moved a finger. Yet I’d swear that girl’s high-spirited—”

As though feeling the presence of a watcher, she turned, slowly. Her face was delicate in feature, and in complexion of that golden clearness which, better words lacking, is called wheat-color. Her dark eyes glanced up and about, until meeting his at the window, they seemed to enlarge with amazement, alarm, then a spell-bound look, almost comic, of horrified curiosity. An instant later she had flung one end of gray silk across for a veil, and balancing her falcon high, moved with a lithe, swimming gait to the head of some ladder or stairway, and gone down into the house.

Morgan, alone once more, smiled.

"Seen by a strange man, poor thing! Probably the first white man she ever laid eyes on. And what eyes they were!"

As he looked out over the valley, along the green tree-tops in its hollow, a snatch from *The Mikado* ran in his head:—

*"'It's oh, I'm glad that moment sad
Was cheered by sight of me!"*

The song came unbidden, and did not make him at all merry. He wondered somewhat about her, her life, the lives of other people, that girl of the Red Sea. His own days might

end here very soon, and perhaps leave nobody wondering much.

"Well, you can't live for ever," he thought, and withdrew from the embrasure. "You're hungry, and tired, and damn thirsty. If it ends in a fight, bare-handed, you'd better be fresh. *Qui dort, dîne*, old man."

He lay down on the floor again, and composed himself to sleep. The voices beyond the door were gone. The sunlight crept from ceiling to wall. No one came to disturb him, but expectation kept his mind on the alert, weary, until drugged by the growing heat of mid-day.

Noise woke him, noise and red flickerings in the gloom. He had slept heavily. It was night, or evening; the archway before him shone with firelight; and in the outer room there were men talking, laughing.

"No, I looked at him," said a voice. "He is asleep, the man-eater."

"That?" cried another. "That a man-eater? A child, you mean. He's a puny thing, the *fauzi sahib*."

"Not so. His fist broke my nose when we bound him. He is a *chor-badan*."

Morgan might have taken this word as a

compliment, for it would signify one who in his clothes does not appear so muscular or powerful as he is.

"A *chor-badan*, I tell you. The man's all hard bone."

"Bones? You'll see how they break, to-morrow!"

A laugh followed this retort; then a sullen voice croaked:—

"Why to-morrow? Let's have him outside and kill him now."

Morgan rolled over cautiously, got on one elbow, and peered. He knew these fickle minds, how they might jump at the proposal.

"No. Not to-night. It was not so agreed."

The archway framed a group of men squatting on the floor,—two shadowy backs nearest, two faces beyond, a bare foot and a doubled knee at the left, a shoulder and half a head opposite—all dim in the uneasy light.

"Six of them," counted Morgan, "and more round the corners."

Amid the group wavered a yellow point of flame, a wick floating in oil of sesame; hot as the night was, a fire burned somewhere; and a tantalizing, famishing smell of cooked meat

filled the house. With all their chatter, they were busily eating.

"I say to-night. Kill him now, and over with," repeated the croaker. "Tie his head in a bag of hot ashes, pound him on the back till he breathes them all down."

"Yes, yes!" cried a pair, evidently youngsters, round the corner. "Good. Well spoken."

"Oh, no." Someone with his mouth full objected mildly. "No, cousins. I have seen that done. Poor sport. They cannot cry out or beg. They only cough and roll. The man I saw could not even scream, though he—"

Another broke in.

"I will tell you," he said, "a better way."

What this one told was ingenious, fanciful. It might be all in joke, for these hillmen never used torture, they only killed outright. Morgan had a plan ready, which would work, to die in hot blood; but nausea, mere disgust and shame for mankind took him while the fluent voice went on explaining. Applause followed, then argument.

"Good, good! Bring him out. Wait, cousins! Yes, to-night! Hear me! I say yes.

No. It was not the agreement. Come on! Wait, no, to-morrow!"

While they wrangled, a late-comer heaved into view, broad under the archway,—a jovial man with his beard stained a bright purple fading into heliotrope at his mouth.

"What's all the noise?" He laughed. "How now?"

His laugh, though good-natured, brought silence. He was Gulab Din, the head of these cousins. The two men facing the arch made room, and he plumped between them. As he did so, Morgan recognized his own belt and service revolver buckled round the fellow's waist.

"Well!" he crowed, "what's all the *takror*?"

Contending voices replied to him.

"Let us kill the *shaitan* of an Englishman to-night. Come, do it now! To-morrow! Agreed. Oh, shut up! Listen, brothers, hear me!"

Gulab Din's big eyes roved round the company, droll and scornful.

"Bees do not make honey by moonlight," said he. "To-morrow, when my bride's father

comes home, we kill him. Not till then.— Here. Food.”

The feasters became quiet again. Lifting a brass cup, he beckoned, to enforce his order.

“Here, Miriam Bibi. Food, and drink.”

His teeth shone in the colored beard, while he glanced up waiting. Out of darkness came a woman, who bent over him with a platter, set it down, rose quickly, disappeared, and as quickly returning with an earthen jar poured his cup full.

“I caught the Man-Eater,” he declared. “We kill him to-morrow, when your father comes home. Your father, Miriam Bibi, gives you to me for catching and killing the Man-Eater. Is it not so?”

The woman drew upright.

“It is so.”

Her voice in that den sounded like music gone astray. Between arm and hip she lifted the dull red jar against the dark blue silk of her garment. She was the girl who had aired her falcon on the roof. Her face, which the fire and the smokily burning wick lighted from below, had the pallor and beauty of a saint’s, but something fatal in its calm.

"Our Lady of the Murderers," thought Morgan. "O pearl before swine!"

Gulab Din squatted there, beard on shoulder, and grinned up at her, gloating.

"It is so," he echoed. "I caught him. By your father's promise you are mine. Take these. A gift."

He spoke as a master to a dog, and with no more ceremony held toward her a small white bundle which Morgan guessed to be his own belongings knotted in his handkerchief. The girl took it without a word.

"Perhaps I will give you the *shaitan's* money," continued Gulab Din. "After to-morrow. Look, his purse. I will count all his pieces of silver."

He chinked a handful of rupees, vaingloriously.

"Who counts," said Miriam Bibi, as if thinking aloud, "who counts, loses."

She quoted a proverb, recalled a superstition, nothing more, but dwelt over the words and made them sweet upon her tongue. Morgan lay watching and listening so hard that perhaps the effort made him too keen. The sweetness might have been a threat. Like

her mild and downcast patience, it seemed to veil danger.

"Last night I did not lose. I won," said Gulab Din. All the same he poured the money into the purse, and rammed the purse into his waistband. "The Man-Eater is my wedding gift. He's in there, asleep. He starves while we feed."

With that, Purple-Beard opened his mouth to drop in a ball of paste and meat. The girl turned away, smiling. Unless it were a deceit of bad light, Morgan read her smile. This young lost Madonna loathed the man from the bottom of her soul.

Feeding went on merrily, talking spread and grew noisy again; but though her shadow loomed once or twice on the farthest wall, Miriam Bibi did not reappear. As if she had withdrawn a light, her absence made the hunched figures look more gloomy, the bearded faces darker, their very ear-locks more dishevelled. Without her, the cousins had little beauty in their tribe. Morgan did not relax attention; but to see them eat made him hungry, and to hear them jabber tired him, with question and answer, joke and rough retort which,

except for a boast now and then of last night's capture, meant nothing to him. These gluttons would never have done.

He was thinking so, when the meal came to an end abruptly. The door creaked open, and from without a man's voice, in hurry or excitement, called:—

“Cousins, come see! Fazl Muhammad has shot—”

With one accord the tribesmen jumped up, those in the archway first, half a dozen more rushing after, and were gone. One hasty foot knocked over the lamp or stepped in the oil, extinguishing the little flame. The door banged, many feet pattered away on hard ground, men talked as they ran, and left behind a surprising stillness.

Whom or what Cousin Fazl Muhammad's gun had brought down, Morgan never knew. He lost no time in speculation, but was up at once, through the arch, treading among empty platters, feeling for the door. No luck: it was fast.

“And I daresay they've gobbled the house out.”

A few embers glowed. He made his way

cautiously about the room, from end to end. The Waziris had eaten all, or carried the last mouthfuls with them. One prize, however, he found: a sweating jar half filled with water, from which he drank, then poured enough to wash his face and hands.

"There, thank God, fresh for another round!"

Greatly restored, he took the jar back to his own room, where later he drank again, and wetting his head, leaned at the window to catch any draught of coolness. He expected nothing more to happen this night, and therefore gave a jump when something did.

"What the deuce?"

It happened under his nose. The patch of stars blackened; there was a grating movement, a dull clink; and then someone began to tap very gently as with a pebble on the stone ledge, —three taps, then a pause, then three taps again. Whatever darkened the opening remained there. Morgan, reaching toward it, felt a brass bowl heaping full, a brass cup, and behind these, alive, startling to the touch, the bent fingers of a little warm hand, no sooner encountered than gone.

He whispered after it in the loophole.

"The blessing of him who is about to perish."

There was not another sound. He waited, and tried again.

"Bees *do* make honey by moonlight."

It seemed, but might be fancy, that he caught the stir of a swiftly indrawn breath, checked as by fright,—the least and most timorous phantom of a desire to laugh. Certainly outside the wall something stole away. Where the hand had been, lay a flat pebble.

"To spite her future bridegroom," he thought. "Miriam Bibi, for a ducat! I knew that girl had a will of her own."

The bowl contained mashed carrot and mutton, still warm; the cup, a good strong drink of native liquor. Both, after twenty-four hours' fast, were excellent. He ate and drank in the dark, standing, with the window ledge for table.

Time passed much better now, for he could while it away, and forget anxiety, cheered by the liquor, yet more by her kindness. Morgan smiled.

"Kindness? I don't know. Can hatred pro-

duce an act of charity? Do men gather figs of thistles, eh?" Then he rebuked himself. "Bah! 'Do cats eat bats, do bats eat cats?' You're talking piffle. Hatred or not, the child took her courage in both hands to do this thing: at night, and for you, her first white devil! Maybe a little pity—At least the white devil is grateful, my dear."

He sat with back against the wall, ruminating. Once he rose to look at the stars, and to consider, or hope, that they had wheeled past midnight. He sat down again. The silence felt thick, dead, as if he were entombed at the heart of solid rock, under a mountain. Long afterward through it crept the indescribable change, breath, turn of the balance, which is the sign of morning.

Perhaps an hour later, the door creaked. Here, thought Morgan, came the cousins trooping in; but no, he was mistaken, for the silence remained as before. Again, more sharply, dry wood groaned. He bent forward and hearkened. Someone pushing the door open, little by little, might have made those two sounds. No more were made, of any kind; yet when the captain had leaned back and

forgotten them, a new quality in the darkness began to approach. It was not sound, but a feeling that the room contained other life, something tense, gradually nearer.

"Come!" said a whisper. "Rise! Come!"

Morgan got up, moved forward, and heard brushing garments pass quickly through the archway. Beyond, to his left, a gray upright showed where the door hung ajar; and as he went roundabout to this, avoiding platters in the middle of the floor, he saw a dark thing arrive there and wait.

A hand caught his own, drew him sidewise through the opening; no larger than a child's hand, but firm, strong, it led and at the same time repressed, making him follow with extreme care. Starshine, after that black room, drenched the world in misty light. His guide, a bundle, took him down a lane of ghosts, of the dead,—sheeted figures, men asleep on *charpais*, head to foot, a double rank along which his boots at every creeping step gritted as though to wake the valley.

They were past, when a man called out behind them, and one of the cots gave a squeak. Morgan felt the little hand grow hard, turn to

stone with him. But the voice roused nobody: it was only that of a sleeper mumbling as he rolled over. They moved again, hand in hand.

At last among stubble his companion halted, and fiercely broke their contact.

"*Höa!*" she snarled. "Go!"

It was a woman, this creature without shape. It flung into his hand a white wad of cloth,—his handkerchief, knotted and weighty. He could hear his watch feebly ticking.

"Go! Go, or this will be my wedding day!"

Her *burka* shrouding her from top to toe like a bolster slip gathered round the neck, with one dark window hole across the face, made her grotesque:—a dumpy rag-doll figure of masquerade, a scare-crow in the gloom, uttering passion.

"Thank you for life," said Morgan. "I go gladly. To save you from him, and—"

"Him?" she cried. "*Bad-dzanawar!* Spawn of the Evil Beast!"

She caught breath, checked her violence, and again whispered:

"Go! The Lord burn you with drought!"

"Which way?" asked the captain. "Up the valley, or down?"

That bolster with a ball for head, stood before him perfectly rigid. She made him think of Lot's wife, the pillar of salt.

"Yes! Yes, I thought so!" It had been the stillness of wrath. "You are all fools and asses, you men. I must show you the way, O helpless one! Come, then."

Turning, she went on rapidly, neither up nor down the valley, but across it. Morgan followed her. Their feet crunched the dry ground, or rustled in wisps of dead millet stubble now and again, as they climbed the slope of the field; once a dog barked, halting them; once they made a circuit round a flat block of a house, doubtful on flat earth-shadow; once, for no reason that he could see or hear, the girl jumped back, waited, then moved forward inch by inch, like a mouse nibbling her way; but in time they began to mount bare hill-side rock, which by the stars he knew for a southern wall of the valley.

"Are you shod with iron?" Miriam Bibi railed at him. "Donkey, Loud-Hoof, waking the hound of the Seven! Yea, Qitmir will bite you!"

They gained a ridge, dropped over, slid

among flying pebbles into a gorge, and climbed again. Morgan overtook and seized her by a fold of cloth.

"Go home," he urged. "Leave me here. Daylight is coming. Go back."

She laughed inside her muffling.

"Here they will find you. And kill you. On."

"What if they do? What then? I am thinking of you, child. Go home now, this moment."

She tugged the cloth away.

"Child? In my father's house I am a woman! Die if you like, one devil the less, but not here. I will not marry that *Afrit* for you."

Morgan bowed to her from his rock below, in the starlight.

"God forbid," said he gravely, "that a white devil should bar your happiness. But it is time you went home."

To that she replied only by going upward like a puff of smoke. The way, which had grown rougher and steeper, now became a zig-zag among splinters of rock, varied by clefts or chimneys to be ascended on all-fours with none too much hold for hand or foot. Active

though he was, Morgan had hard work to keep that smoky bundle within view. It reached another summit, waited for him, hurried across, and down a zig-zag even more headlong, chutes of keen-edged gravel, a labyrinth of boulders warm still from yesterday's burning.

"Go back, I tell you."

They dropped on the bed of a gully.

"Quicker now," she said flitting down.

The notch of water-worn stone grew narrow, deep, with many a turn, the last of which fell into a great round pot-hole.

"Here is the Boiler. No man rides a horse beyond, this way," declared Miriam Bibi. "Now through the Snake's Belly."

A pale-green circle of sky, pricked with whitening stars, hung over them far aloft, seen as from the bottom of a well; her eyes glittered through the square hole in that sack; plainly, there was too much light. Morgan groped in the handkerchief, got his watch, and read its glow-worm dial.

"Quarter to four," he groaned. "Curse the thing. Stopped. Running down when we heard it."

Miriam Bibi snatched his hand in contempt.

"Child, you will never pass through the Snake's Belly," she cried, "without help. You know nothing, you and your toys."

By force of anger she dragged him along, till a gap in the rock swallowed them. The same vanished cataract which had bored out the Boiler pot-hole, here had driven underground a tunnel, hardly wider than a man. With their backs to the left wall, they moved sidewise, down step by step, footing a ledge that again and again was broken off, where nothing but her hand, and her impatient word or two in warning, brought him over some unknown depth. The corridor, pitch black, deserved its name, winding and wriggling down with continual bends. At one of these the girl pulled him across, and for a long time led him face to face with the right wall, so tight pressed that the buttons of his tunic scraped and rattled. Somewhere deeper, they crossed again, and thus continued to change, edging now with elbows to rock, now with bosom to it, always downward.

"Here."

Light glimmered underneath. Suddenly they were out, and could see. Where in the rains

a torrent would have spouted, they emerged from the hill to stand on the apron of what had been a waterfall.

"Here is the top of Zulfikar's Tangai. Go down it, babe without a mother—" she began, but stopped. Her voice rose wailing. "Alas, it is day!"

A forlorn breach, a ragged wound cutting wilderness, the pass called Zulfikar's Tangai ran a crooked mile below them, marked silver gray at bottom of its dry cascades. Two mountain spurs overlapped its end. The sky between was flushed all pink with morning.

"Ah!" said Morgan. "I feared. It comes too swift in your country."

He turned as he spoke. The Snake's Belly reared a column of darkness, beneath which lay water-carven rock, worn here like toadstools deformed, there like the trunks of elephants or enormous evil roots. Miriam Bibi sat down among them.

"It is day," she wailed. "I never can go back."

In her ungainly shroud, the girl seemed a phantasm of midnight, overtaken and betrayed by dawn. Her eyes, through the criss-cross

lattice of threads in the hood, burned sombre. Like her words, they spoke despair. Suddenly she did a thing more eloquent than either, for she rose, tore off the *burka*, and flung it on the ground.

"There! I am a shameless woman! They will stone me to death."

Turning, she made for the hole in the rocks. Morgan was beside her at once. They had re-entered the tunnel, when she whipped about, as if to strike him.

"What now? Is it not enough?" she panted. "What are you doing?"

"Coming back with you."

For the first time he saw her face near, distinct, its high color, delicate red warming beneath pale gold. The look, all scorn, with which she held him, gradually became wonder.

"Back with me? Yours will be worse than stoning. You? Again? Why?"

"Life for life," said Morgan.

She read the eyes of this quiet youth.

"Well, there are men and—other men," she reflected. "It is a dream. I do not believe—"

She put him aside, walked slowly out to the edge of the dry fall, and took her former seat.

"It is better," she declared. "Go home, then. I stay and die here."

She drew about her the folds of dark blue silk, and leaning forward, hid her face in both hands. Morgan waited, without speaking, for he did not know what to say. Down beyond the foot of Zulfikar's Tangai, the sun was rising. Neither a sound nor a breath of air, only the shrinking of old shadows and the lengthening of new, disturbed the weary mountains, burnt umber and black, until their crests began to glow with the light that would soon be heat. Morgan chose another rock, apart from her.

When she looked up, he sat there smoking his pipe.

"Why do you stay?"

"Because I cannot think what else to do."

She gave him a hard, slant look.

"And I called you donkey."

"And I"—Morgan crossed one leg on the other—"called you a child."

The look melted. Her great eyes could be very lovely, or so he fancied while they withdrew and sought the ground. They might almost have been smiling.

Time went by; sunlight filled the pass; the

two sat there without further speech, and Morgan, reloading his pipe, continued to smoke for occupation. He had exhausted the fact: there was nothing to do but stay.

His companion raised her head.

"Hark!"

They both listened. The captain heard nothing.

"Horses."

A moment later he agreed and gave a nod. From far below, intermittent, came the scrabble and click of horseshoes on broken rock.

"Yes. They are coming up."

Into the notch of the defile bobbed one by one little heads,—turbaned heads, he thought. A dozen horsemen rode slowly through the foot of the Tangai.

"Who are they?"

Morgan waited for them to draw out of shadow. A tiny white-speckled thing might be his own mare, Echo, but he would not reply till the sun caught them, and he could guess the color of the riders. To his great relief, it was khaki.

"They are troopers."

Miriam Bibi had risen, and now came to him.

She looked him in the face like a sorrowful young queen.

"They are your men. Tell me. Shall you give me to one of your men?"

"No," said Morgan. "It is not our custom."

"Then I go with you."

Lifting her *burka* from the ground, he offered it. She put on that shapeless garment of virtue, and without another word followed him, a queer white penitent, clambering down the bed of the cascades.

His troopers, led by Afzal Khan, were more than glad to see him, and politely mystified by the veiled woman. Otherwise their meeting had an air of common arrangement, daily habit: one man fetched the piebald mare, another presented the captain's sword, and at his order all reined about to go down the way they had climbed. Morgan, with the girl seated behind him grasping a borrowed belt, rode at their head and offered no remarks. When they had left the pass, wound through the notch, and in the next ravine were descending a path wide enough for two horses abreast, he beckoned his *jemadar*.

Afzal Khan came alongside, ready for reproof. The captain explained as much as he thought fit.

"The sentries are not to blame," he added. "The trick was well planned, and cleverly done."

His hearer's face brightened.

"We were as those who had lost father and mother. A true word, sahib. Clever. Gulab Din could steal the coat off a gnat."

They rode for a time in silence. Because of it, because the man asked nothing further, Morgan spoke again.

"Yet Gulab Din has lost: this lady, who saved me—"

The strain upon Afzal Khan's good behavior was too great.

"I thought so!" The old ruffian's eyes flashed; he clapped his thigh, and laughed inwardly, rolling his head. "Two for one! The robber is robbed. Lo, a catcher of mice laid hand on the tiger!"

He fell behind, chuckling with joy, relishing a stroke in the game which was after his own heart.

Morgan could not share this delight. All

day, all the next, along the journey home he cudgelled his brain: what on earth was he to do with her? It was evening when they rode among the lamps of the station, and dismounted. He lifted her down from the mare, stood wondering, then in desperation called the *jemadar*, and led him aside.

"Look here. Where can I take her?"

Afzal Khan did not even hesitate.

"To the *ressaldar's* house? He is a good married man with a wife. He can put her in the *zenana*."

"You're a jewel," thought Morgan. He knew the married officer, a worthy Musalman. "Well said!"

With a huge burden off his mind, he rejoined the waiting captive. Long afterward he was to remember her docility.

"What you order," she sighed, "that I do."

A fortnight passed. Busy with other affairs—among them, duty taken out of turn for a sick man—Morgan had little time to think about the *ressaldar's* house. One night he lay in his own, a bungalow with mud walls and thatched roof, plain but comfortable quarters, where a long rattan chair and a book provided

luxury. His room-mate had gone out; his lamp near by heated the air, if that were possible; and though his book was the French version, by Defremery and Sanguinetti, of the marvelous things which befell Ibn Batuta, he found its page swimming away. Tired but only half asleep, he could not enjoy rest.

Something dropped. He woke with a jump, and saw Miriam Bibi standing before him, unveiled, in tears.

"Eh?" For a moment he blinked as though she were a person from the Arabian traveller's tale, from long ago and far away, returned to life. "What's the matter?"

He stood up, and saw that she was trembling.

"I have come to you." She choked, fought down a tumult of emotion, wrung her hands, then grew unnaturally calm. "I cannot live there. All in that house is *kash-ma-kash*, pulling this way, that way, tearing into little bits. The woman—Agh, the daughter of a whistling kite! She watches her husband. Jealous. Of me! That foolish graybeard, swept into every corner by the wind of his wife's cloak! Me—whose forefather was Alexander the Great's son, by a fairy of the Hindu Kush! And she

spies, and prates, and hates. It is slow death in her house. And she has egged on a common hireling soldier, a kitchen hanger-on, a little Indikai, to talk to me of—Of what? Oh, wonder! Of love—”

Her pride and grief were like a flame in the room. She broke off, weeping, her arms outspread in surrender.

“Take me! Keep me in your house!”

“My poor child,” said Morgan, “that can’t be.”

“Then it is true.” Her arms dropped to her sides. “It is true what the hanger-on, the black scavenger of kitchens, told me. You love the colonel’s daughter who is coming here, from your land beyond Roum.”

“Not so,” replied the captain. “He has no daughter.”

The brightness of her eyes pained him then, and later was to haunt him.

“All liars!” she cried. A pitiful smile curved her lips. “No, you are true. But you would lie for her. A man’s way.”

Morgan could not fathom her meaning. She regarded him long, nodding her head slightly, as if they had reached some unbreakable agree-

ment, at which she continued to smile because it was tragic.

"Not for us, you and me," she said. "*Ab na tab*. Neither in this world nor the next."

She turned, and went slowly out through the verandah. Morgan followed to the steps. Her shadow disappeared from lamplight, moving toward the *ressaldar's* house.

He slept ill that night, with uneasy dreams, and was glad next morning when more work fell to his lot. Saturday afternoon came round before he got an hour's freedom. He had bathed and dressed, when a man stood at the door, waiting.

"Come in," he called.

It was Afzal Khan who entered. As they had parted company an hour ago, Morgan let the man wait, chose a walking-stick, and filled his old pig-skin box with cigarettes.

"Well?"

He expected an after-thought, a minor detail of the stables or the lines.

"I have news," reported Afzal Khan, "from over the border. She went home."

"Who? What is this?"

The hook-nosed veteran bowed.

"Yes. Miriam Bibi. The *ressaldar* was away on duty, sahib, and his wife never told. The girl bade you farewell one night? Yes? Ah, you did not know. But from this door she walked home, all the way, taking neither food nor water."

Morgan stared at him.

"She went back, a shameless woman. They brought her upon a hill outside the village, according to old custom, and there at sunrise they stoned her to death."

The captain bent his walking-stick in agony, threw it away, and sat down.

"Good God!" said he. "The brutes. I—" Afzal Khan smiled.

"It is life, sahib." Whatever the man felt, if anything, his hard, bearded face of bronze did not reveal. "Thus life comes, life goes. How should I know the old wife was a devil? How should you know the girl was giving you her heart?"

Morgan jumped up. He could hear no more, bear not another word.

"Enough. Please go."

"She was my sister's only daughter," said Afzal Khan. "A woman, that is all. But I

have been her horse, trotting her on my knee, sahib. So I, too—”

He walked out of the room.

A northeasterly wind had blown all morning and fallen, leaving the sky over-clouded, the air murky with dust borne perhaps from China and banked in a pale fiery glare. Morgan went down the steps of his bungalow, helmet on head, stick in hand. Pathan bagpipes were squealing high, Pathan drums beat a rowdy accompaniment. Their noise must have drawn him unaware, for he came to the polo ground, and viewed ponies darting about, white-shirted riders clicking their mallets, a white ball that rolled along dirt dry as emery. He looked on, but did not know what he saw, or who stood next him in the crowd.

“Captain Morgan?”

His colonel was passing with a lady, and stopped. He caught words of introduction.

“My niece from America, Miss Wayne.”

The lady, like the players, wore white. She had fair hair and blue eyes. Morgan, looking out from torment, knew her for the one he had met in the Red Sea. He babbled something or other.

"Why aren't you playing to-day?"

The ball flew toward one of the goals. Every bagpipe and drum in the band made uproar as the ponies chased after.

"Oh, yes, thank you," said Morgan, escaping. "A bit seedy. Capital stroke. No, not this afternoon."

PART THREE
THE STOLEN CARAVAN

PART III.

THE STOLEN CARAVAN

EDMUND Bull, the lieutenant sharing Morgan's bungalow and enlivening his days there, was a blond youth whose pink face could not grow sunburnt, and whose manner, frivolous in all that did not concern horses and work, often misled a stranger. He made men smile, was called sometimes Bashan, sometimes the Parson's Piping Bullfinch, and might seem a joke, even a mild fool, until you watched him train a horse, inspect stables, play polo, or track, fight, capture, and cross-examine Waziris. Bull in action had Morgan's complete respect; Bull in idleness often kept him laughing.

On Saturday night, however, they spent a dull enough interval between dinner and bedtime. The younger man, relaxed after hard

exercise followed by a couple of *burra* pegs, lay in his chair and talked extravagantly, but drew no response. Morgan, except that he had his eyes open and pipe going, might have been asleep.

"How did you like our match to-day?"

The question fell dead. Bull put it again.

"Yes," replied Morgan. "I don't know."

The lieutenant made a grimace.

"What?" he drawled. "As pretty as all that, was she?"

Morgan's look startled him,—a look at first of anger, then of surprise and wincing pain.

"Who?"

"Don't bite my head off," said Bull. "The colonel's niece. I saw you talking together."

"Oh. Her." Morgan sank back. "So we did."

For a moment the other eyed him closely. His air of relief had been as puzzling as that bound and stare out of revery, like some wounded thing in a cave. He was never moody. What had come over him? The pink-cheeked youth, wiser than he looked, refrained from asking aloud, yawned, reached lazily for a

book, and began to read. Morgan went on smoking as if alone.

By and by the reader laughed.

"Here you are!" he called. "I have discovered you in print, your portrait to the life. Give ear, my boy."

He rattled off the discovery, which sounded like a thing of his own invention:—

"In my native Wales . . . the wild sheep leap from rock to rock so much as a matter of course that you would, in time, be surprised if they didn't. And that naturally gives me a sympathy with all that is sublime on the one hand or piteous on the other.'"

It failed. Morgan, who always took chaffing in the most amiable vein, and returned better than he got, only forced a smile, knocked out his pipe, and soon afterward rose.

"Good night. I'm for bed."

Half an hour later, as he stared from a hot pillow, and waited for the white ceiling cloth to belly in a stir of air which never came, he fancied that his night lamp burned too high. Rolling his head, he cast a weary look at it, and found Bull standing in the doorway with a lighted candle.

"Anything wrong, son?"

"Not a thing, thank you, Bashan."

Pajamas giddy with color, and tow hair sleeked down like wax, gave strange worldliness to a figure which might have been that of a timid boy breaking rules in a dormitory.

"Not ill, are you?"

"No, no. Trot off to sleep, old varnish-top."

Anxiety, worn by so incorrigible an infant's face over the candle, was both funny and touching.

"Or wait," said Morgan. "Your name heads the roster. Look here: let me take your turn, won't you? It will be a cure for the hump. Station life's a bit too much for me just now."

Bull regarded him with doubt.

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes. Come, as a favor. Meanwhile you could run down to Dera Ghazi and cheat Lemoine out of that horse you've coveted so long."

The boy gave up trying to see through him.

"Oh, I say! You're a—Well, agreed if you like. I never can make you out, Morgan, but

any time you wish me to eat my shirt for you, or do a parlor trick of that nature, apply here."

The speaker tapped his breastbone.

"Lavender, green, and pink stripes are poisonous if taken internally while effervescing," rejoined Morgan with a yawn, "though their disappearance might relieve the eye. Good night. Tell the bearers to call me, not you, if a message comes in."

He rolled over, and lay staring awake as before, yet comforted by the new, solemn devotion of this butterfly. It furnished an object of thought to displace a memory, the haunting brightness in Miriam Bibi's eyes, and to dim the picture of her horrible journey. He slept at last; received no message until morning, after breakfast; and then, glad to be gone, took the road with his horsemen again, leaving a grateful but puzzled young Bashan who saw them off, wished them luck, and wondered what the colonel's niece could have said, or what bad news might have come out from home.

While on this tour of duty, which proved to be dull and not very profitable, Morgan's troop lay encamped a week among the hills, where every day blistered hotter than the one

before and nothing seemed alive but the tiny whirlwinds of black grit that jumped up at noonday and danced like so many gyrating devils. Every night in the small hours, punctual to his time, there came a lone sniper on the hills above who fired into the camp, shot after shot at long, exasperating intervals, regular as the performance of a rite. He hit no one, but made himself a nuisance, breaking the men's sleep.

Morgan sent out after him a party of ten, who caught nobody, and did well to return without breaking their necks. The crack of his rifle went on, patiently spiteful, the flash of it like a fire-fly among the black crags.

One hot midnight, during this annoyance, Afzal Khan appeared before the captain.

"Sahib, I ask permission to go get that sniper."

"You may go," said Morgan.

The volunteer took nothing but a water-bottle and his *chore*, the long, straight hanger of the Pathan, much like an overgrown kitchen knife, or half a spear-head split lengthwise. He was gone, a momentary blur in the starlight, then nothing, not even a footfall. For

an hour the shots continued, a dozen rounds or more. The rest of the night was calm.

In the morning Afzal Khan brought a well-worn bandoleer half full of cartridges, a greasy old leathern water-bag, and a rifle, a rough-stocked imitation Snider from some Kabul factory. These he laid down one by one.

"All the man had, sahib. He will never snipe again in this world."

The *jemadar* spoke without boasting, rather gloomily. Morgan knew what feat had been performed, what the trophies cost, but saw that praise would not be welcome.

"How did you find him when ten men couldn't?"

"It was easy, sahib. *Sauka char*. He was my cousin. I knew where he would be."

They said nothing more at the time. Indeed, since their last talk in Morgan's bungalow, the two had exchanged few words but on duty, for Afzal Khan had kept aloof, with a taciturn if not surly air. A few days afterward, at the station, he left the service and bade farewell. In a tent pitched for the ceremony, officers both of his own race and of Morgan's held a little *darbar*, when he received the parchment scroll

of honorable discharge conveying the right, won by twenty faithful years, to wear the sword. He bore himself gravely, a proud figure, as he offered the hilt to be touched and remitted.

His round of informal good-byes ended at Morgan's verandah. Though now a masterless man, the hook-nosed warrior did not unbend.

"I go back to my own people," he said, gruffly. "Across the border."

"May you prosper among them."

"God knows." Afzal Khan gave a shrug of doubt. "The Man with Seven Uncles went hungry."

Morgan considered him: this behavior might be anything from grief to hostility: it was best to believe in the worthier motive.

"Is there a gift you would take home from me, by which to remember our days together?"

The Pathan's dark eyes remained hard.

"I will think."

"Do so, and name it."

The process of thought was long.

"Sahib, have I earned my bread and salt?"

"No man better."

Afzal Khan pondered again.

"Then," he declared at last, "I will name it, and it shall be no small thing, for we have been glad together, and have sorrowed together. Sahib, if ever you find in your country another knife of horn, like yours, with that crook for the frog of a hoof—"

Morgan went straight indoors, brought out his knife with the farrier's hook, and forced it into the man's hand. It was not mentioned again or glanced at, though they stood face to face a while, as if waiting.

"Perhaps we shall fight each other. Who knows?" The veteran chuckled. "Well. Good-bye, sahib." He moved away, then turned. "One thing. Either you dead, or Gulab Din dead. There is no other way."

"Thank you, *jemadar* sahib," said Morgan. "I'll bear it in mind."

The other nodded, swung round, went marching off, and was seen no more.

Fatteh Ali Shah reigned in his stead, making a good *jemadar*, but not so good as he. Daily the captain missed him, above all when they took the road or worked in the hills. One afternoon, returning hot and cross from a

failure, Morgan was ready to think that Afzal Khan had carried away the luck of the troop. In a pass not far behind, a caravan had been attacked, a driver shot dead, the owner beaten senseless, and his wife, his merchandise and all his fifteen camels carried off, the raiders leaving no more trace than if they, with their rich and cumbersome booty, had turned into thin air. The merchant, knocked on the head when the fray began, gave a poor though voluble description, by which Morgan learned only that three young men appeared to have been the ring-leaders.

"I wish our old rogue were still with us. He'd know their likeliest hiding-hole."

The *sowars* were riding homeward slowly, for both men and horses were tired, the sun beat down merciless on them, and they had five miles yet to go. Rounding the point of a sand-hill, they saw the flat waste burn hotter than ever, flawed with mirage of boiling air, cracked and blotched with shadow dry as charcoal, along the rims of twisting gullies. On the plain, two hundred yards away, a pair of figures lived and moved,—a woman in white

on a white horse, and a turbaned orderly on a brown.

"My hat!" growled Morgan. "The colonel's niece. Young idiot!"

He roused his poor mare to a canter, and rode up.

"Good afternoon, Miss Wayne."

In that fierce desolation, the girl seemed quite at home, as cool and dainty as if it were a summer meadow; she sat her horse well; and at another time, her greeting might have pleased the young man.

"Oh, you, Captain Morgan?"

It was his luck to be in ill humor whenever they met.

"Yes. Glad we're in time to ride home with you."

Her blue eyes were quick: they read him with a little amusement which he did not partake.

"Did we men surprise you at all, coming into view?"

"Why," she replied, "I saw you were khaki."

"Ah. And what if we'd not been?"

She found no answer to these dry words, or to the gesture accompanying, by which he somehow made her horse wheel and come on with

his piebald mare. A bit of rebellion would not harm such a man.

"I am in disgrace?"

"I did not say that, Miss Wayne," he rejoined bluntly. "But it is foolhardy, to ride so far from the station, alone.—Yes, alone. One orderly does not count."

"I saw nothing to be alarmed at, in the landscape."

"No, you wouldn't. It's their bread and butter, not to be seen."

The meaning of this curt remark she failed to grasp: on a later day it would be thrust home rudely and fully: but now as they jogged together at the head of his troop, Miss Wayne felt the young man to be domineering. They had not met since the afternoon of the polo match, when he had appeared not only too shy and gentle, as before, but dazed, helpless. He must be very odd, she thought; and yet stealing a good look at him, beside her, she found no oddity except that he could ever have been that clerical shipmate in the Red Sea. Hard, lean, brown as one of his own men, with sharp little tired creases cut by wind and sun about the eyes, he was, from helmet to polished leggings and

dusty spurs, nothing but a soldier. He watched the ground ahead, and did not glance toward her.

"Your horse and mine," she ventured, after long silence, "would go well in a circus together. White and piebald."

"So they do," he answered at random. "Fearfully hot, don't you think?"

He was not even listening to her. A moment afterward, he halted and raised one hand. The padding of hoofs and creak of leather which followed them, stopped. Not until then did she guess what preoccupied him. In the sultry stillness there sounded a drumming no louder, to her ears, than a pulse.

"Yes." He looked back. "News."

Out of mirage that dissolved the waste behind them, a horseman came galloping. Dust flew low on his track, but shone in a cloud as he arrived, jerked up short, and saluted the captain. A Pathan in uniform, he perched like a bearded monkey, grinning, on a dark roan plastered white with sweat.

"We caught Fazl Muhammad and his two brothers," cried this messenger. "We have them at the fort, sahib."

"That's a good horse," quoth Morgan.
"Don't kill him, O son of Faridun."

The man grinned more than ever.

"Did your father breed him, too?"

"Yes, sahib."

The messenger beamed gratification, like a child, as he dropped back among the troopers. It came into Miss Wayne's mind that her companion had an easy offhand way of greeting wild riders from nowhere, and making friends with them. If so, he employed another manner toward women.

"I'm afraid," he said, "you must turn and come with us to the fort. Sorry. But the men can't be divided at present. Not for you, even."

"How splendid! I was about to beg you to let me watch the fun."

He looked at her askance under drooping eyelids.

"Fun? There won't be much of that; but I don't see what else to do with you."

They wheeled, and rode by the *sowars*, who wheeled after. Along the dusty track where they had come, all went plodding with the sun

in their faces now, and the disappointment of the horses under them to deject their spirit.

"I'm sorry," declared the captain.

"You need not be."

The heat probably tried his temper. She would allow for this; and so thinking, found her own temper comically vexed because he treated her as a nuisance. No doubt the heat magnified trifles, as it changed and distorted every edge of *nullah* or mound. Beyond the place where they had met, round the spur of the sand-hill whence he and his men had appeared, into a blind furnace of little valleys that bent, dodged, opened, shut, and criss-crossed among wavering ridges of gravel, his calico mare faithfully bore him, tired beast and tired man going back to work. Nature herself might have lain down and died here, burnt to a crisp. The girl felt an overcoming sense of pity: endeavor seemed so futile, and yet this lantern-jawed young Quixote rode beside her, miles away in a thought which was bent on doing something.

Past a gray-green thorn clump on a rise, they reached a higher level, and saw near by a

mud fort squatting under foothills. The mountains rose behind, seared peaks, to dwarf all.

"Here we are," announced Morgan. "Hope we shan't stay long. It's hotter inside the fort than out. You come get into the shade."

A crowd of Waziris in grimy robes and greasy locks, with naked boys, and dust-powdered ponies, blocked the fort gate, but were held in order by a few dismounted troopers of this outpost. Morgan helped her down from the saddle, waved them apart, and brought her to a rock under the shadow of the old brown wall.

"If you'll sit here," he said, "we can keep an eye on you."

How he expected to, she did not know, for he plunged into the crowd and was gone. She saw among turbans and skull caps his khaki helmet pass through the gate, where an old balk of timber ran athwart, for lintel, between two low, square towers of mud pock-pitted with bullet holes. It was only by degrees while awaiting his return and viewing in detail the scene about her, that she discovered what forethought he had already taken. The rock, with a wall to lean against, made a comfortable bench; one of the towers cast over it a shadow,

meagre enough, but the broadest in the landscape; two paces away at her right stood an armed man, two paces at her left, another, and a third in front had drawn up their horses to screen her from the general gaze. It was not privacy, for the ground falling somewhat she could see Waziri heads below, more than one wild face and bird-like stare; but these fringes of the crowd had been quietly withdrawn from her, and the crowd itself reformed on three sides of a hollow square at the gate.

"Smooth as clock-work," she reflected. "He did this, and you never heard a voice raised."

The babble of talk indeed went on without pause, continuously tranquil, so like running water as to cheat the ear,—a bewildering sound among these hills bone-dead with drought. What little air moved, came down hot, lifeless, oven-baked from neighboring ravines. Each higher point and flank of rock swam in umber haze, that withered to lilac on the far peaks. Time dragged. Miss Wayne felt the hour, place, and people fantastic. Tribesmen, long-robed, wrapped in cloth as if cold, packing themselves tightly together elbow to elbow, grinning with excitement, rank with

sweat, endured a blaze of heat and on tiptoe craned their necks to behold her, when all the background, mountain unto burnt mountain, declared that man and his doings were naught, the buzz of a scorched fly in a lamp chimney. She had never known such a feeling, unreal yet sharp.

"It's time he came out."

The girl was not a coward; but to lean against the wall and hear unknown tongues murmur witticism, became trying.

"There he is."

Morgan returned from the fort, under the gate beam, leading a squad of men. He halted them on open ground, beyond the shadow. At once they were the mark for all eyes, and made the brook of talk run dry, forgotten.

"Fazl Muhammad," said Morgan, in a high, cool voice, "with his brothers, Jafr Khan and Shah Nawaz, are held here under arrest for having robbed this merchant of his caravan."

It was an odd little group which he had brought out; four troopers with carbines, who looked virtuously stiff and solemn; a tall, handsome, gray-bearded lion of a man with his left arm in a sling, across his forehead a blood-

stained bandage peeping from the folds of his turban; and three young villainous Pathans, jaunty, dirty, hard-featured, all wearing a most impudent leer. Morgan turned from them, and strolled up to where Miss Wayne sat.

"I'm doing this out here," he told her, quietly, "so as to 'encourage the others.' They need a lesson. And besides, they can see that we deal above-board. I think you'd better go inside the fort."

"Oh, no!" she begged. "Please not. I wouldn't miss it now for worlds."

The captain shook his head, in doubt or displeasure.

"You may see something you won't like."

Her smile implored him.

"Do let me stay?"

For a moment his leathern face betrayed humor in its perplexity, a kind of relenting as toward a child.

"I wish you'd go in," he began.

"Please, no."

"Very well, then," said he. "But don't blame anyone. We didn't bring you here from choice, you know."

With that he returned to the squad before

the gate, halted, and eyed each man from top to toe. His air, sceptical but resigned, nearly made her laugh outright; it was that of a sergeant preparing, with disgust, to drill a bad lot of recruits. Then, moving nearer, he snapped out a question. The tall merchant answered, with a rush of words and play of gesture that increased her merriment, for his lion-like repose, his dignity of a wounded prophet, fell from him as though he cast off a garment. The change was burlesque,—a Jeremiah turning chatterbox, palavering, explaining greedily, cringing and sweating in the hot sun. It was no wonder, she thought, that the trio of prisoners chuckled, nudged elbows, and rolled their eyes at him in derision. Yet Morgan's profile, when she watched him again, rebuked her sense of comedy. He stood there at ease, deliberate and cold, but with a darkening face. To the three captives he put some brief question, then another, and another. They swaggered at him, laughed in replying, and tossed off jokes for the crowd to catch; but it struck Miss Wayne that their clowning was affected, and that their black rat eyes exchanging glances did not meet the eyes of their judge.

He waited, thought, and spoke again, gravely. No, all this was not in fun. Round their hollow square the faces of the crowd, scowling open-mouthed with desire to hear, told her it was deadly earnest.

The talk went forward. Their words came to her, but not their meaning. At last Morgan drew back, turned his wrist, read his watch-dial, and squinted up at the sun over the fort wall.

"*Bas*," he concluded. "Enough."

The merchant, dismissed by a wave of the hand, made salaam and with his former Biblical grandeur, if not more, went stalking to join the front rank of the crowd.

Morgan faced his prisoners, made them a short but evidently clear speech, and pointed at the beam of timber in the gate.

The three brothers laughed heartily. One of them bawled a retort. Laughter also passed round the onlookers, but it conveyed no mirth, —a dry cackle which ended in the hiss of drawn breath, followed by whispers. A trooper, ducking his head through the sling of his carbine, hurried into the fort. Miss Wayne found

Morgan beside her, wiping his forehead with a handkerchief.

"You go in," he ordered. "Now."

"Oh, no." She sat firm. "What was it? What did you say to them?"

"I said . . . Go in." He was not so calm as he looked. "Go into the fort, I tell you."

"I will not."

He stared angrily at his watch.

"I said . . . Well, it's proved. The merchant remembered their faces. Of course they denied. Two of 'em I'd seen before, that night in the house of my enemy Gulab Din. The third, Fazl Muhammad, told me just how, in so many words, they helped stone her, that poor girl, to death." The captain fought something down. "That means nothing to you, nor to me now in the present case. But they're guilty this time as well. They denied they ever saw any caravan. I said—I flew off the hooks a bit. Never mind."

He wiped his forehead again, replaced his helmet, and tucked away the handkerchief. Miss Wayne felt that here was a man, still and deep, who suffered, and whom she could not help.

"I said—" He gave a nod. "And I'll stand to it. 'If you brothers don't produce fifteen camels, the merchant's wife, his *kajawahs* with the full tale of Bokhara carpets, dried fruit, silks, and spices, to the value of about two thousand rupees per camel, I'll hang you all three by the neck to that beam, at sunset.'

"They laughed. You heard 'em. They told me:—

" 'Go ahead and hang.' "

Morgan read his watch as before.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "you never—"

"They understand I have no legal right to do more," said he, "than clap them into jail for three months. That's why they laugh. Now you go inside the fort, away from what's to happen."

Miss Wayne got on foot with energy, as if to perform a great deed, then waited powerless.

"Never," she said. "You can't. You mustn't."

Morgan turned from her.

"Can't I?"

In the gate appeared the hurrying trooper who slung his carbine on his back. He carried an old ammunition box and a coil of light yel-

low rope. The box he placed carefully and squarely under the gate beam; the rope he tossed aloft, so that it flew over and came dangling to hand, double. Shocked by the sight, Miss Wayne found herself looking at the crowd with a dull belief that some one of course would interfere. Not a man moved; of all the eyes that watched, not a pair saw anything but the preparation in the gate. When they had forced her own thither, back unwillingly, she saw three stacks of boxes in a row under the beam, and the three brothers, each on a stack with a loose rope round his neck, and hands bound behind him. All three were laughing.

She sat down, weak, lost, as if taken from her own life and world into another.

"Impossible." She clung to the word. "Impossible."

One of the brothers, crying aloud, made a joke. They laughed more than ever. An old song came dinning in her mind.

"Sae rantingly, sae wantonly,
Sae dauntingly gaed he;
He played a spring, and danced it round,
Below the gallows-tree."

It mocked her distress, jingling over and over, this refrain which she had heard somewhere as a child, and forgotten. The three young Pathans neither played nor danced; their dirty gowns gave them a rag-bag aspect, their eyes burned with a glee that was pure malevolence; yet to see them outbrave the shadow of the beam, ridicule its threat, scoff and grimace ape-like at their judge, made her wonder if they were not, in daring at least, far-away kinsmen of the highland freebooter who lived by sturt and strife and died by the rope at Inverness.

Morgan, pacing evenly back and forth, stopped near her.

"Do you know," said he, "it's a bit like Macpherson's Rant."

She stared at him. They had been thinking one and the same thought. Surely this man could not be so iron-hard as he pretended.

"The words were in my ears, too," she replied. "How strange! Both of us."

"Why," said Morgan, lightly, "in a thing like this, you do sometimes feel how true the old poets are."

He was moving off, when she rose and called after him.

"Don't let this go on. It's horrible. And it's useless and absurd. You can't."

"Ah, you think not?"

His composure nettled her.

"Look at them!" she cried. "They're not even frightened."

"It's a trifle early for that," answered Morgan. "But the sun is getting lower."

He asserted a fact of which, until then, she had not been aware, and which gave her an ugly surprise. The wall and towers of the fort threw a broadening shadow on the ground. More than half of the afternoon was gone.

"Do stop, Captain Morgan. You yourself said it was not legal."

Another plain fact jumped into view, unforeseen, to amaze her. She was not one watching at the side, but one in the centre being watched; for all men's eyes roundabout held her with a single glitter, a focus and union of expectancy. The three brethren in their yellow halts did not joke now, but stared like everyone else. The moment seemed a long balancing of doubt.

Morgan brought it to an end.

"They are robbers and murderers." His look scared her, his voice was loud, rough. "They can restore the caravan, or hang at sunset. It is their choice. Not yours, theirs. *Bas!*"

He walked back and forth past the gate, back and forth slowly measuring the dust with his light tread, giving nobody another word or glance, but seeming to count every pace and meditate as if alone. Miss Wayne could not even guess the nature of that meditation. His rebuke to her had been a roar, with a strange flash of something hidden, false, perhaps cruel. She had begged for men's lives, and before them all he had exulted in refusing her. Along the front of elbowing Waziris passed whispers like a breeze, as face bent to dark face contributing a secret which kept her always in one corner of an eye. She knew what it was: they hoped she would entreat him once more. They were open and simple, she felt, in comparison with this young tyrant who walked up and down alone.

"Think what you are doing," she began.

The silence and the watching were again turned full upon her.

"No!" He stopped, glowered, and shouted. "No, I tell you!"

He swung round, and continued to pace off dust. Angry, beaten, abashed by the unwinking public stare, Miss Wayne sat down on her rock. Whispers running about the square became murmurs, which grew loud and changed to a continuous high gabble of excitement. The three men in halters were frowning, shifting their weight uneasily from leg to leg, darting little furtive looks everywhere, with their heads and shoulders cramped as if ready to dodge. A voice rose out of the crowd.

"Sahib! *Captan* Sahib!"

Morgan halted.

"Yes? Who calls?"

"*Captan* Sahib, let me come," begged the voice. "Let me speak to you."

"Come here, then," said Morgan. "Make way for him, you."

Through the ranks burst a lean little fellow in the dingiest robe of all, who ran to the captain and bowed low.

"Well? Who are you?"

"I am Aki the Runner, Sahib, grant me leave to speak privately with those three brothers." The fellow grinned. "They are fools. I am well known for talking sense."

"Privately?"

"Yes, sahib."

The drawn little face, like that of a withered boy, seemed knowing and confident.

"*Jemadar*, remove the guards from the prisoners," called Morgan. "There you are. Go ahead. Talk your sense to them."

Miss Wayne, who caught the meaning not of the words but of the pantomime, watched this new figure salaam and go skipping to the gate. All three noosed heads bent close to his, at once agitated in a fierce wrangle. He stretched upon tiptoe, they leaned from their ammunition boxes, and the ropes under the gallows beam shook with the give and take of argument. Plainly a divided council, it went on and on, appearing to end in a knot of silence, all four faces together, then breaking out anew. Minute after minute slipped away.

"I go!" cried the little man, suddenly. "I go!"

He jumped back, turned, scampered, and

dove into the crowd, to reappear next moment as a tiny mustard-yellow shape running far off across the sand, like a child in a night-gown. He flew at speed beyond belief, vanished from the sunlight, twinkled as a gray dot along shadow, and was gone round a promontory of gravel where the nearest ravine cut into the hills.

For a long time afterward there was no change but one, and that hardly perceptible, the creeping of shadow from the fort walls along the crowd, up their bodies, over their faces, out on the dust behind them. The long suspense of the movement, and the stillness which fell upon everyone, grew more than Miss Wayne could endure. Morgan leaned against his piebald mare as if tired. Once he drew out a pocket-book, in which with the saddle for desk he wrote a memorandum, and which he folded carefully away inside his tunic. A trooper hauled the three ropes taut over the gallows, and made all fast to the great beam used for barring the gate. He then stood by, ready, watching Morgan, who did not lift his eyes from the ground, but patted the mare with one arm over her croup.

A knock with a carbine-butt would send the scaffold of boxes toppling from under. Everyone knew it, waited for it to happen.

Miss Wayne jumped up. Not only stillness now, but the faces of the three brothers, their unearthly color and large eyes, were intolerable. Approaching death marked them out, above all other faces there, like—what? Who had seen this before?—like Chaucer's poor devil in the throng. The old poets were true. He had said it, this terror, this little man without a heart who leaned on his horse and cared for nothing.

She ran to where he stood.

"You can't mean to hang them."

Morgan roused, but would not meet her eyes. He looked at his watch, and pointed to the sun.

"In about twenty-five minutes you'll know whether I mean it or not."

Following the lift of his arm, she saw over the fort a great sullen disk of red poised on a hill as though to trundle down its edge, down a wavy rim not yet melted into evening haze.

"You are dreadful."

She went back to her wall, and sat trying to

see no more of anything. By and by a footstep told her that he was near.

"Look," said Morgan. "Thanks to you."

He stood erect beside her, holding to his eyes a field glass, of which the black barrels remained steady as rock until he lowered and gave it her. She then saw that his hands were trembling.

"Look." He nodded toward the mouth of that ravine where Aki the Runner had gone. "We owe it to you."

Through the glass appeared a round field smoky with magnified dust, nothing more; but when she had learned to control and direct this, into it leaped a picture of the gravel promontory, the gorge opening behind, and a faint cloud as of orange vapor blowing down from hill to plain. Under the cloud came one by one the dark shaggy-maned bodies of camels, awkwardly bobbing in a long file.

"The *shuturs*, thank God," said Morgan. "You see them? All's well."

She handed the field glass to him.

"Now will you let those poor wretches go?"

"Not yet." He gave a short, weary laugh.

"Not till we know what is in the panniers."

A hiss of relief or satisfaction went traveling round the crowd.

"*Shutur! Yishon!* Behold, the camels!"

They came hurrying over the dust, a long-legged caravan tethered with rope head to tail, their *kajawahs*, or box-like panniers, making them all angles and cubes of top hamper. Aki the Runner came in first, panting but smiling. The camels flapped their lips on high and overlooked mankind, supercilious, aged, feeble, as if they had lost or forgotten their spectacles. In the foremost *kajawah* with an awning tilted over her head perched a lady who resembled other bales of merchandise, but for the window in her shroud and her black eyes looking down.

"My House!" cried the wounded merchant, on spying her. "God is great. Now let us see."

He left her in her perch, and ran along the caravan to count his goods. Out of the crowd sprang men who ran with him, the drivers, each to his own camel. Beast after beast knelt, grunting; panniers came unlashed by magic; bales and bundles were disgorged, overhauled, re-packed; and the last afterglow of sunset was fading over all this confusion before the

merchant came back to Morgan. He came jubilating, with salaam.

"It is all here, sahib!"

Turning toward the gate, Morgan set the brothers free by a wave of the hand.

"You may go. Loose them."

A *sowar* stepped forward and untied their hands. The three ducked their heads, wriggled off their nooses, jumped to the ground, and next moment stood laughing with their friends, like a troupe of conjurers who had performed some clever trick and now enjoyed the applause.

"Sahib, I beg you will accept this." Grand as a prophet once more, the tall merchant held under his sound arm a bale tightly sewn in jute. "It is the true Royal Bokhara."

Very promptly, Morgan knocked one of the boxes from the scaffold, and stood upon it, overtopping the crowd.

"No, I thank you," he answered in his loudest voice. "The *Sarkar* takes neither present nor bribe from any man. But to bring you luck, I will buy one small piece of silk, your best. And let all here watch our bargain, to see that I pay the full bazaar price."

It was twilight when the troopers rode

homeward; their horses went more cheerfully now, being rested, and knowing this way led to stables; yet they still wound in and out among sandhills when the dusk had fallen and stars begun to shine. It seemed a long night march. No one spoke. Miss Wayne knew that along with the gray shadow of her own horse moved a spotted blur which was the captain's mare. He rode in silence, like his men. The girl had no desire to break it.

A change, a thinning in the gloom, overspread the intricacy of ravines down which they travelled. The sky ahead became vaporous with yellow green; the lower stars failed, shrank; every hillock, mound, and thorn bush darkened, its edge being slowly whetted into view, as behind them increased a glow like that of a huge bonfire miles away. Doubling one last cape where black rock jutted on sand, the riders entered a sea of moonlight. The full moon, enormous, tinged with saffron, was bulging from the horizon, forcing its way up through dust at the end of the world.

In this low radiance, Morgan spoke.

"Will you forgive me?" he asked. "I had to be rude. No choice."

Angry, incensed because her anger was living on a disappointment which he had no right to create, she could not answer. The tone of his voice nevertheless moved and surprised her. Here was a worn-out man, being not only courteous but humble.

"It was my fault," he continued. "Those chaps boasted of killing the poor child. That was another—another case. A man shouldn't let two cases overlap. But I lost my head, you see. Then having threatened them,—why, there was the dilemma: if we let them go, we made the Service a joke; if we hanged them, it was the end of me. Oh, I tell you, Miss Wayne, the thing was bitter. Your begging for their lives did the trick, saved the caravan, saved the *Sarkar's* face, saved all. I was acting, but you were real. You won this day for us."

He did not look toward her, but stared straight on into the moon.

"How?"

"By pity," said he. "When they saw me being such a brute to you, they caved in. Here was a devil, they thought, whom not even you . . . " He paused, and heaved a breath.

"How little we know! It was infernal. I had to play every card in the game. I had to play you, and what you felt."

His gazing ended.

"It's too soon to be forgiven. But won't you take this? Not from me, but from the caravan you saved, along with the rest of us?"

He held out a film of silk, that glistened, and had the same color as the moonlight.

"You will? I'll carry it home for you."

So saying, he tucked the bright cloth under his belt, like a favor to be worn. They rode on, in a splendor of low moonbeams and long shadows.

"But tell me," she demanded. "If—if it had gone wrong. Did you mean to hang them?"

He gave a shrug.

"You must not believe all we say in a moment of—er—in a pinch like that. Look!" He pointed with his left arm. "The station lamps. By the way—forgot to mention it—I sent your orderly home to tell the colonel where you are."

His answer left her puzzled. Watching the

lamps blink, a row of sleepy embers in a dark hollow, she did not yet feel certain what kind of person he was; but she began to see why others called him the Man-Eater.

PART FOUR

SARNAI

PART IV.

SARNAI

LIFE at the frontier station moved so drowsily, in a round of days all alike, blinding hot and still, that anyone who knew it only on the surface could forget the passage of time, the age of an event, new or old. To a stranger, a woman, it easily became a repetition of the same day.

"Not any place for a woman, this," growled the colonel, more than once. "Glad you're with us, my dear, of course. A pleasure to the eye. Fresh as a rose. But it's wrong; and I'll send you packing before you're like the rest of 'em, the color of tinned asparagus."

The rest of them, who suffered by his comparison, were three other ladies enduring hot weather in a dismal region for the sake of their

men: the major's wife, the doctor's, and the sister of a young political officer. In what they called the cool of the evening, these women cheerfully held their state, presiding at little wicker tables by the tennis court, serving tea. Brown imps, half-naked, ran past them to gather up balls; a languid umpire sat aloft smoking, near by; white-flanneled players fought out match after match of doubles on the sun-baked clay, until glare mingled with the tamarisk shadow, and the band of scarlet cotton edging the net would no longer guide the eyesight. Then while dusk began to fall, the company gathered at the tables, forgot all manifestations of energy, praised the tea—an excellent brew of Darjeeling tips and buds—and sat quietly in talk which though not brilliant had the merit that it made no pretence to be so, but was home-like and good-humored. The youngsters in flannel, with their mild jokes and private brand of slang, gave it all such an undergraduate air that Miss Wayne, hearing, replying, defending herself from too generous admiration or her native land from sly caricature, could almost have forgotten they were not at a garden party near some college.

"What a very nice lot of boys they are!" she said afterward.

"They are dears," replied the major's wife.

Among them at these idle hours Captain Morgan played a fair game of tennis, joined the tables with the last four of the evening, had not much to say, and appeared rather frightened by so many ladies. He did not shine at all, but made a good listener. It was easy (and it gratified Miss Wayne in secret, with a pleasure disowned at once) to guess that other men liked him; although their liking took the form of banter now and again, while he leaned back as if retired from conversation, knocked off a cigarette ash, and glanced up with a twinkle of humor in his dark eyes.

Three or four such meetings at the court, left her almost ready to doubt her own memory and the evidence of a moonlight-colored silk scarf in her bureau drawer.

"How dull Captain Morgan seems, for such a dashing man."

"He?" The major's wife stared. "My dear child, you do say odd things, for he is the most un-dashing young man I ever knew."

They both laughed at the epithet.

"Now Edmund Bull, if you like, is a thruster—"

Miss Wayne let the subject be changed and another's praise be sung, but retained her own opinion. Here where the weeks dozed by, it was hard to believe that over her uncle's garden hedge, past neighboring roofs of thatch, her known world ended on a wilderness empty and still but for the play of burning air; that danger, sullen mystery, dwelt beyond; that her agreeable youths at tea or tennis came fresh from the unknown, and would rather talk about anything else. It was harder to believe that the shyest of them had been her companion, only the other afternoon, in savage mediæval doings under a gallows beam at a fort gate.

Since then he had not recalled these to her, nor in fact spoken more than a few commonplace words at meeting. Perhaps he did not like her. There was no reason why he should. Let it pass, then, the whole affair. Having thus decided, she found to her annoyance that it would not.

"You need a scolding," she thought. "This comes of too little to do."

Lieutenant Bull, riding up to her verandah at the moment, made for once a welcome diversion. The pink-faced child was always arriving with some pretext, thinner than the one before, to see her and cast woebegone looks, until he had become a kind of entertaining nuisance. This time he brought an invitation.

"Won't you come out with my bobbery pack to-morrow morning?" he asked. "They're no end of fun, really. I'll ask another chap along with us, you know. It's great larks to see them at work."

Next morning about dawn, therefore, while the colonel sat in his pajamas enjoying an early cup of tea beside the verandah rail, into the driveway came two horsemen surrounded by a queer little rabble of dogs. These last—seven terriers of more than seven breeds, and three spindling Pathan greyhounds with hairy-tufted ears—were Bull's famous bobbery pack, his pride and joy, though known to his fellows variously as the Pound-keeper's Lament, the Vermin, Bashan's Trained Fleas, and the Harriers of Hell. From her window Miss Wayne saw them approach, then discovered that their master indeed had with him "another chap"

who rode a piebald mare; and it was very silly, but true, that on the heels of this discovery she felt glad because her clothing chanced to be a new habit of brown holland, well cut and trim.

"What's all this?" grumbled the colonel. "Poachers on horseback? At this hour? It's time honest men were in bed."

She heard Bull's piping voice reply.

"Oh, I say, sir, this is the 'Unt!—

*"The dusky night rides down the sky,
And ushers in the morn;
The 'ounds all join in glorious cry,
The 'untsman winds 'is 'orn.
And an-'untin' we will go.'"*

The colonel snorted.

"You wind your horns in my neighborhood, young man, and see what happens to you. Hounds? Dear me. Those? Dear me, dear me. A wretched sight to begin the day."

Morgan gave a chuckle, but his friend spoke up without shame.

"They're Spartan breed, sir. Come and watch them. I do believe you'd enjoy a run with us. Come, sir, won't you?"

"Me? I like that!" cried the colonel. "An old soldier with nothing but his reputation—"

Miss Wayne snatched flattery from her glass, then went out to join them in the verandah. They were all three on a broad grin. The motley pack swarmed along the croton border, whined, and wriggled with expectancy, as a groom came leading her white horse.

"Good morning."

Both hunters replied, the sleek-headed nuisance beaming as ever, Morgan with a brief look of what might be pleasure or approval, that in some way enhanced the moment for her.

"His reputation and a niece from America. Well, go on," sighed her uncle over his teacup. "I wish it was 'a southerly wind and a cloudy sky'. Go on.—Don't jump my hedge!"

They did, of course, Miss Wayne foremost in disobedience—it was a low straggle of withered rose-bush—and left him to wave his fist at them. The dogs poured through the gate, raced roundabout, then came dancing before their lord, worshipping him with eager eyes, while the horses walked sedately down the road. If not cool, the air of dawn was at least mild; a freshness, rare and transitory, greeted the nostrils; and throughout the station prevailed an early silence, house after house

quiet, vacant, every roof a mound of tarnished golden thatch seeming more lifeless than an old haystack. From her saddle Miss Wayne could overlook other stunted hedges, other gardens, chiefly dust with a few pathetic bits of flower bed, where under the boughs of tamarisk by some far corner her neighbors, pajama-clad ghosts, lay dimly exposed to view, asleep, each in a tall gauzy box of mosquito netting. Past these intimate scenes the bobbery pack and its followers went with stealth, padding in sand, refraining from noise. Nobody else moved, except once a gardener who squatted, half-awake, inertly drawing a little trench for water along the dust.

They rode by, and did not speak till out of ear-shot.

"I'm glad you had no horn to wind," said the girl. "How very still and tired it all seemed!"

"Sleepy-heads," replied Bull. "The cream of the day, this. Lazy-bones, think of 'em, snoring away the precious moments: a horrid frowst."

The dogs looked up at the sound of his voice, waited, then bounced on, skipping in

rowdy glee. Through a mud village that clung to the outskirts of the station, their road now turned toward open wilderness; a brown groom, leading his master's polo pony for exercise, met and salaamed as he passed; round the well a hooded bullock went swaying, and the Persian wheel creaked mournfully, hoisting and lowering its rosy jars all a-drip. The bullock-driver halted to stare gravely at the hunters.

"Look out, Bashan," called Morgan. "Your lot will be visiting their cousins, yonder."

In the dirt close by, asleep, lay a revolting group of pariah dogs, livid skin and bone, more mange than hair. Bull's greyhounds turned their heads away in contempt, like wise Pathans, and daintily sidled past; but the terriers were agog, ready for a dash at anything four-footed, game or carrion. He had just time to check them. His companions laughed.

"Cousins? Oh, unkind word!"

Morgan found that laughter made her face a pure delight to see.

"All the same"—When they had ridden only a short way beyond, she gave a backward

glance and a little shiver—"all the same they were dreadful."

"Yes, it's pitiable," said Morgan. "They ought all to be chloroformed, poor brutes. If a man were king of that village—"

The lieutenant, scoffing, caught up his words.

"King? You mean emperor. The whole country's alive with 'em."

The incident was a trifle. Yet she did not fail to perceive that of the two men it had been the more perplexing, the more contradictory, who divined and shared her thought. Below this man-eater's iron surface, after all, remained something of the youth who tried to rescue dying swallows from Romeo the sea-cook's cat. Into her mind there crept a vague comfort as of a difference healing, an estrangement being removed from between old friends. It lingered, no more than a hint, quite irrational: perhaps not quite welcome, but of that she could not be certain.

Outside the village lay patches of barley stubble, pale tinder melancholy in the dawn, a thin frost-like coat of chaff blighting the earth. Crows made raucous din far off,—strange crows with gray heads on black bodies, that

hopped and fluttered round a skeleton thorn bush. No other life disturbed the waste of sand and gravel which this morning twilight made darker than in daytime, more flat, treacherously smoothed by lack of shadow, every seam, pitfall, sunken path and wandering *nullah* bank obliterated. The dull-brown maze of hollows might have been a plain. Beyond it the crinkled western hills rose frowning, blank and sour.

"The Debatable Land," said Miss Wayne. "It's—it's Childe Roland country."

"Very much so," agreed Morgan. "Does the scent appear a trifle cold, Bashan?"

"Give them time, won't you?" rejoined Bull. "They've only begun."

His dogs galloped, nosing the gravel hopefully, diving from sight, emerging paws and ears first out of a chasm in the ground. They scattered and ran together like quicksilver, the youngest of terriers chased whipping along with a mad belief that he could overtake a greyhound, and their high spirits made even the wilderness lively. Absence of game signified not at all. Their master had spoken the truth, for it did one good to follow his bobbery pack.

Time flew by. The increase of light came with surprise, and so, too, the call of a trumpet floating over the sand from far behind, sounding reveille. All three laughed as they cantered.

"That bed-ridden station," cried Bull, with scorn, "only waking up now!"

Like true early risers, they had owned the world, ruled it in freedom for an age. Brown hill-tops ahead were suddenly powdered with gold. The dogs wheeled toward the right, and began to scamper in line where an embankment of sand abruptly dropped, curving. Below this a clay-green river, shrunken tributary of Indus, flowed through shadow and glaze not yet touched by eastern light. A crane stood near the shore of an island, forty feet away, motionless, like a gray bronze garden ornament stuck in a puddle.

"They've hit! They've hit!"

Bull rode after the dogs, and vanished like them, slithering his horse down a dry gully. Miss Wayne, who paused to tighten her chin-strap, found the piebald mare had not followed, but was waiting beside her.

"Such fun! Isn't it?"

What Morgan found, was that her girl's face, delicately glowing, had an absurd perfection under a great mannish helmet of white pith, and that her fingers as they pulled the strap down were charming, like all else, even to the very bend of her linen sleeve.

"Yes," he answered.

When she looked, his eyes were not on her, but staring at an object in the distance. A hundred yards or more upstream, the land ran shelving to a beach, and there by the water's edge cocked a little hut of faded yellow reeds, near which two men, with sticks or gun-barrels in hand, waited or watched.

"What are they?"

"The guard at the ford," he answered. "Sepoys. On duty. Civil police."

A boat lay grounded in front of this pair, with a naked ferryman hunched on the mud beneath her stem. There was nothing more to see, yet Morgan remained at gaze, fallen into a revery so long that the girl wondered at him. He had forgotten her, she knew, forgotten where they were and what they did. His eyes, holding steadily in view something that was not

on earth, meditated with the sadness of a poet or a dreamer.

"What are you thinking of, so hard?"

He spoke after a while, without rousing, as if alone.

"Of her. That was the way we came home, by the ford. She and I. Miriam."

Here was a reply with a vengeance.

"What?—Why did you speak my name?"

The dreamer woke.

"Your name? I—? No."

Each caught as in a reflection the same startled doubt.

"No, indeed," said Morgan. "How could that be? I don't know it. Thinking aloud. What did I say?"

His face could not whiten, but into it visibly came fear.

"Then . . . Some woman at the tennis court did call you so! I thought it was a mistake, a fancy, a trick of—Do you mean your name is really—?"

There was a haunted look about the man, which moved her.

"Yes. My name is Miriam Wayne."

He groaned.

"You? Again. I—This—I hope I'll never bring you bad luck."

The words were bluntly spoken, and from the heart. She could not fathom their meaning, yet was conscious that under them lay dread of an omen. He sat still, with eyes downcast, fingers mechanically plucking into order a tangled strand of the mare's mane; and then without prologue, emphasis, or change of demeanor, was quietly telling her the story of Miriam Bibi, who had saved him and died for it.

"Poor girl," was all she could say. "Oh, poor thing."

At that he gave her a sidelong glance, diffident, appealing, like a boy who had confessed to his mother.

"It's a relief, you know. You're the only person—"

"I understand you better now. They were Gulab Din's men, those three robbers at the fort?"

"Yes, my enemy's," he answered. "They helped to stone her. And gloated. To me.—Thanks ever so much for listening."

She could not reply. What he had told, the

manner in which he had unbosomed all, stirred her as deeply with alarm and compassion as though he had spoken of love. The sun had risen, poured its first low glory for miles on the sand, over their faces, across the river, down to the bottom of the hills. Neither girl nor man saw this transformation, but waited, their eyes unwilling to part.

Thus Edmund Bull, scrambling up the *nul-lah*, spied them before his horse came above the crest, and thought he observed a new light upon them which was not the splendor of sunrise. It gave him a very hard honest pang.

"No more hope for this johnny," he told himself. "Not a bit. Never a chance."

He halted, whistled for his dogs, and bawled commands at them, as loud as possible, though they were climbing after him perfectly obedient.

"Well, that's over." A good little sportsman, the pink-cheeked Bashan bade farewell to another young dream of his own. "You're not in the old boy's class. Never had the pace, you fool. She couldn't do better."

He rode up, therefore, with a pretty fair grin and a wave of the hand.

"Foiled again. False alarm," he hailed them. "We rummaged the length of the *shegga*, but nothing in it."

Not without cause did men at Simla, every year, despatch telegrams begging him to come take the lead in amateur theatricals. The Parson's Bullfinch could do comedy. He seemed no more discouraged than his dogs.

"Where next?"

"Miss Wayne would like," declared Morgan, "to see the ford."

Having said nothing of the kind, she admired this promptness. It ended a moment of embarrassment, which was odd, she felt, because they had said nothing that the younger man might not have been free to hear. Yet was this true? She dared not consider the question, but even while she gathered her bridle-rein, had answered it; for no one must ever know what they had said, or how great a change had come in secret.

"Right," cried Bull. "The ford it is, then. Round again, boys."

The pack wheeled and trotted before as they rode up-stream. Below in his puddle the gray-bronze crane twisted a wry neck to watch them,

shrugged his wings in an impulse of flight, then lazily decided there was no danger, and once more became a statue.

Miss Wayne caught Morgan eyeing her.

"What," said his look, "made you smile then?"

She gave him half an answer, aloud.

"That funny old Long-Legs!"

The other half could not be told: here stood the ridiculous bird, solemn, unchanged, all the time when so much had happened.

"He wiggles his toes in the mud," remarked Bull, "and little fish come to gape at 'em. A jolly way of breakfasting. Cool enticement. Much better than bad coffee, goat's milk, burnt toast, and a last week's newspaper full of bosh."

For the moment a thought crossed her mind that the youth had grown gayer all at once. If so, it was only an effect of their little holiday, of this pleasant morning hour together, which made even the greyhounds cut a thin-legged caper or two as they went slinking in advance, down the *nullah* shade, over the bottom of dry, rounded stones, and up again to the high bright sand along the river bank.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Morgan, suddenly.
"Another one. Who's that?"

On the curving beach, ahead, between the yellow reed hut and the water, appeared four men where there had been three. The squatting native by the boat sprang up and gesticulated. The khaki figures of the two sepoy were knotted together in what seemed a very deliberate struggle with a tall bundle, which as they presently drew back from it and stood clear, became a long-robed Pathan. He and the nearer guard held a cord sagging between them, as if ready to indulge the ferryman or the other guard in a game at skipping rope.

"What's up now? Trot, Bashan."

Dogs and horses quickened their gait. They swept down the beach, past the box of reeds, to a halt.

"Nothing," said Bull, "but an arrest."

The guards drew rigidly up and saluted. The ferryman, breaking off some loud harangue, retreated with a salaam. As for the man in the long robe, he did no more than scowl. On his wrists gleamed a pair of well-worn handcuffs, to the chain of which was tied a good

stout rope. It was not a game being played by the ford.

Lieutenant Bull put a question. He who held the other end of the rope, taking a few fresh turns round his right hand, and passing his rifle into his left, made a quiet answer. Again the lieutenant spoke. Both guards, gravely smiling, and looking one to the other for confirmation, replied in turn at some length. Miss Wayne caught little or nothing but a word which they repeated now and then:—

"Sarnai sarnai, sahib."

Morgan, who kept his eyes on their prisoner, wore the cold, sombre air that she remembered well. It made her watch more closely, and try to learn its cause. The Pathan, a hard-featured young reprobate, had a bruise on one cheek-bone; sand clung thick to his ear-locks, plastered his dirty robe, which hung stiff as it dried from a recent wetting; and like some creature of the night, a draggled bird of prey, he out-stared his captors with a malice that did not wink against the full sunrise. His hawk eyes and oily brown face reminded her of someone she had known.

"Why," she said, "it's one of your three at the fort."

"Yes," replied Morgan, impatiently. "Jafr Khan. Caught again. I don't like this."

She would not interrupt, and waited. Their talk went on, she and the naked ferryman being mutes and audience to the scene, but with a difference, for she envied him that he could understand it. At last Morgan gave some brief advice to the guards, and turned away.

"What has the man done this time?"

He did not hear her. It was Bull who explained.

"Oh, of course. I'll show you."

At a word, the man holding the rope swung his captive about. Down Jafr Khan's be-sanded back there hung, on a loop of thong, an old goat-skin bag, empty, flat, with a few black and white hairs not yet rubbed from the leather.

"They arrested him last night, you see. He carried the thing under his clothes, but a bit peeped out. When we first saw them, they were roping his handcuffs. They'll haul him in to the station with the evidence hung round his neck, like the chap's albatross in the poem, eh?"

"But why?" asked Miriam. "What was wrong?"

"Don't you know," rejoined Bull with surprise, "that it's illegal to have a *sarnai* in your possession? Not the bagpipe kind. Our friend Jafr Khan was bound somewhere on mischief. Honest people cross by the fords or the ferries, go and come openly, under the guards' eyes."

"But what has an old leather bag to do—"

"There! I keep on forgetting you're a stranger!" The youth smiled. "A *sarnai* is a *maskh*, a float. Raiders use 'em constantly. You blow that bag up like a balloon, wade into the river, and kick away like winking."

He whistled to his bobbery pack, returned the salute of the guards, and rode beside her up the beach. Morgan, at her right hand, seemed lost in thought.

"They swim the river on bags, blown up?" She groped after a picture in her memory. "Where have I seen them? Oh, now it comes back! Centuries ago. Rawlinson's *Ancient Monarchies*. This old, old, old land, with the same thing still going on."

Morgan burst out laughing.

"Will you please tell us, Miss Wayne," he begged, "when and why and where on earth you ever read Rawlinson?"

"At home, in America. When I was a tiny little girl. On the floor, in a big dark house in the country, when it rained. Three ugly brown volumes. The Kings of Ur and Accad, the horsemen and the chariots thereof. They were great fun. Pictures from Koyunjik, or something. Warriors who swam rivers on inflated skins.—And yes, to think, the warriors had curly beards and ear-locks, just like these people nowadays!"

"Ah, I daresay," was Bull's comment. "They'd never learn to swim in a thousand years. No practice in the bath-tub, even, for our gentry. They're all dry-bobs."

Morgan rode along chuckling. She heard a murmur from him.

"Delightful."

Where the delight inhered, she could not guess; but something of it shone on his face, quizzical and friendly. Something more of it belonged to her, whose random talk had called it into being. She was glad to have pleased him.

"What amuses you?"

"Your portrait," said he, "as a child."

Bull attended strictly to his dogs. For a while the captain had nothing more to say, but dropped into a cheerful brown study. With the river now at their backs, they jogged through glaring desert, where she knew, his introverted gaze told her, that he saw a little girl, years ago and thousands of miles away, who lay flat on a rug, kicked her feet in air, and dreamed over a book of by-gone mysteries.

He returned suddenly to the present.

"Look here, Bashan." He had grown serious again. "I've a sermon to preach, and you must back me up."

"Right-oh," said the master of the pack. "I'll hand the plate about if you like.—What's your text, parson?"

"*Sarnai*. And it's no joke." Morgan brought his mare to a walk, then waited until all three kept pace together. "That man with the *sarnai*, Jafr Khan, is neighbor and cousin to one Gulab Din, a gentleman with a purple beard, an active brain, and not many scruples worth mention. I don't like it. I don't like

it at all, this appearance of friend Jafr Khan down here. And I want a promise from you."

Lieutenant Bull began mouthing a fragment of Hamlet and the ghost.

"Swear by me sawd!—Swearrrr!"

Morgan stopped him.

"This is not a joke, I tell you. Help us out, Bashan, like a good fellow. Miss Wayne ought to know how unsafe it can be, thoroughly unsafe, to ride off the station alone. Back me up. Tell her she must not, and that so long as one of us is here, off duty, however disagreeable it may be to her, we'll see that she does not!"

The younger man dropped his nonsense.

"Why, of course," he agreed. "You're quite right. I will try to—Hallo!"

The dogs went swirling away before them.

"Look! There he is!"

Northward of the risen sun, ahead, low on the sand with movement hardly perceptible against a background of gravel, crept a lean, four-legged thing. At first view it might have been one of the pariah dogs with his hair restored; at the next, crossing a dip in the gravel, it showed black on the glow, a fox-like silhou-

ette, sharp-nosed, prick-eared, and furtive. It was a belated jackal stealing home from his night's prowl round garbage-can and dust-bin at the station. Bull's three greyhounds, flying in airy leaps that scorned the earth, were half way to him before he turned his head from profile, held for one instant his black fox-mask toward them, and was gone, a flash, a grayness darting along the nearest band of shadow.

Terriers after hounds, and horse after terriers, raced Bull and his pack. Miriam's tall white steed, with the captain's little piebald, came galloping not far behind. The drum of a dozen hoofs made her heart rejoice; the air which after sunrise had warmed and dried now suddenly reviving rushed past, cool on her cheeks and throat; while the vanishing of the dogs, into the ground at a gully, over the skyline as the horses plunged down one bank and up the next, kept her in suspense that was both wild and laughable. Her hopes ran divided, now with the pack, now with their quarry. On the whole she wanted that jackal to escape.

So did the jackal; and he must have known a short cut or private dodge in the nullahs, for

when all galloped on level sand again, there flew the gray streak farther ahead, his lead increased. He was making for some rocks that clustered on the point of a long water-worn cape or sand-spit.

"Oh, do let him go!"

They pulled up under the crags, where the terriers, yelping with rage, scrambled and fell and jumped again to explore every hole in a honeycomb of brown rock. The Pathan greyhounds worked with gingerly caution, but climbed faster.

"Please let him off, this time!"

The crannies being too open for more than temporary shelter, he could give only a moment's check, then must away. Bull, in the midst of his joy, turned and was wonderstruck.

"You really mean it?"

"The poor beast, he gave us such a good run!"

"He's yours, then." The good little martyr flung off his horse, and began to climb. "Here, Meg! Down, Kamran, down, boy!—He's yours, Miss Wayne, to live and run another day.—Come out of that, Haidar, Knobs, you old fool!"

With great labor, shouting, pulling, driving, he got his pack down from the rocks. A war dance of dogs round him, with bright eyes and lolling tongues, expected word of some new stratagem.

"Home, boys.—No, you don't. Back here! To heel!"

Their master mounted. In gloom and disbelief they followed the horses, leaving for no reason whatever a jackal who smelled to heaven, a jackal as good as caught, to laugh at them in his vile citadel.

The wind of the chase had blown away other affairs. Miriam Wayne, at least, could remember none that had been in mind before. As they rode back, however, along their own hoof-prints, Morgan returned to an old subject they had thrown down and dashed away from.

"Don't forget what we were saying, will you?" he asked. "I must leave you here. This beggar over yonder—"

He pointed across the sand toward the hidden river. Two men on foot came slowly moving eastward, a tiny pair in the distance. While Morgan's arm was raised, the one in

front suddenly halted, the one behind ran a few paces, took the lead, and began jerking as at a balky horse. The action suggested rope between them.

"It's only Jafr Khan," said Bull, "and the guard hauling him."

Morgan reined his mare aside.

"The guard," he rejoined, "has a rifle to carry and only one arm for hauling with. Horse-flesh will help him do the trick. Besides, we don't want a rescue of the chap, and I do want to hear his examination. As a friend of Gulab Din's, he may have been up to something.—Good-bye. See you both later."

So saying, he cantered away.

The calico mare chased her long shadow on the dust, and became a particolored toy that rapidly drew near the struggling midgets.

"There," complained Bull, "goes one of the best in the world. But it's all my eye, running off where he's not needed; true to form, though, just like him. You know, Miss Wayne, he never gets rid of the shop,—so frightfully keen, an old maid for work, that you can't persuade him to chuck it and rest a while."

The pack, taking heart again, trotted in ad-

vance to sniff the ground and overlook nothing on the way home. Miriam would gladly have turned them after the calico mare, but found herself not bold enough. In secret it was good to know that this man-eater, who disappointed her by riding away so lightly, could be an old maid for work. After all, he would see her later, as he said. Had she known how much later, where, and at what dark hour, she might have set higher value on Captain Morgan's none too complimentary keenness.

"You and he, I take it, are great friends?"

"Are we?" cried little Bashan. "Come. Let me tell you about him, will you?"

She raised no objection. From the wilderness to the village, between the mud hovels, up the station road, Bull discussed one thing only, one man's nature and deeds. What change was come over the pink-cheeked infant? How had she wronged him, ever, by thinking of him as a droll nuisance, a pest who admired girls from habit, and could not talk sense to them? There were no more woe-begone looks. He spoke out, with ardor, praising his friend to a pitch extremely high, above horses and dogs, but never absurd. She

felt ashamed of her empty question, when here for answer came tumbling, in broken, boyish language straight from his heart, the story of a David told by a Jonathan who was no fool.

"Thank you," she said, as they turned into the garden. "A morning with your bobbery pack is all that you promised, and more.—Good-bye, doggies. Don't hate the wicked woman who sided with the jackal.—Do you know, you're a friend worth keeping? You make me rather envy the captain."

"Oh! But you have!" The young man blushed and stammered. "Both of us!—That is, I mean to say—"

She disentangled him with a word or two and a laugh, before running up the steps.

At bed-time came an echo of their talk. Her uncle dined at the mess that evening, but afterward sat with her below the verandah and smoked a cigar. It was another breathless night, when a wicker chair under the starlight seemed better than hot sheets in a box of mosquito net.

"Try not to call me too selfish an old fellow."

"Why ought I?"

They were exchanging sleepy words without much aim.

"For having your company," replied the colonel. "If I did my plain duty, I'd send you out of this. You're so like your mother in every way, though. My dear sister: we were great pals once.—Hm! That goes back to the nursery. It makes one feel old."

The cigar brightened, showing his gray moustache and the blunt end of his nose, then faded.

"Old and peevish. But this, now, is a touch of home. To-day I've been fretting like a file. Putting everybody's teeth on edge."

"What about?"

"Nothing. Three stolen rifles." The smoker yawned. "Up there in the hills, across the frontier, of course a good rifle's worth its weight in silver. Literally, I mean. They weigh 'em in their old balances, you know, a rifle on one scale against silver rupees in the other. Nothing to make a grown man turn all upside down, as I've done this afternoon. Well, one comfort, I sent our best man out on the track of them.—Well, well. Life's a

bother. You're very soothing to the aged, my dear."

His niece did not thank him, but waited.

"Who is your best man?"

"Don't quote me. I've no favorites."

"Oh, no, Uncle Godfrey. But who went out?"

"Morgan. In my judgment, that is. You must know him. Of course you do: he was here this morning.—Don't you repeat this, ever."

She allowed him to smoke for a time.

"Is it—dangerous?"

"What? Is what dangerous?"

"That kind of work. Going after the rifle-stealers."

Uncle Godfrey gave a second yawn, more unhinging than the first.

"No. Perhaps. All kinds may be. You never can tell, out there."

The stars no longer drowsed above her, but shone wakeful. Out there he was probably going by the light of them, where they and other things watched for good or evil, and you never could tell.

"No admirers to-night, my dear? The little

Teddy Bull has not come to worship for at least four hours. Not ill, is he?"

Miriam laughed.

"Why, after all, he's not a bad little fellow. I'm coming to like the Teddy more and more."

"Ah. Do you? No, he's a good enough sort in his way."

Thus agreed the colonel, amiably; but when they had said good-night and parted, he grumbled to himself.

"Invariably pick the second-best, women do." The veteran cooled his bare feet on a *chunam* floor, and stared wisely at his candle. "Always. Their blessed intuition, eh? And a lucky thing for most of us. Damn it. Go to bed, you aged ass. None of them ever picked you. At any rate, not the right one. She knew that much. To bed, to bed again."

He might have doubted part of this wisdom, had he known what his niece thought meanwhile, in her gauze cage under the stars. He did not know, and next day was further misled by the sight of young Bull's horse waiting, as ever, in the shade behind the bungalow.

"That boy camps here."

True enough, in the verandah a pair of

heads, one glossy knob and one bright radiance—just like her mother's hair, thought the colonel—were bending forward in much closer and deeper conference than he approved. Back to his desk under the punkah tramped Uncle Godfrey with a snort.

"Sheeps' eyes. We'll break this up for a bit."

Their talk would have pacified him.

"And where did you first meet?" Miriam was asking.

"Years ago," replied the time-worn babe, "up at Gilgit. He was awfully good to me. Like a brother. I've known Morgan for ages. Now, to show you the kind of chap: he took me, a puppy with my eyes not open—"

And so it went, and so on, till the murmur of his words made the colonel, who not only failed to catch their meaning but knew they had none, bring down his burnished horse-shoe with a clang on the desk, and stop trying to work.

"Here goes. I'll do it."

The tyrant spoke, and acted. On the same evening Lieutenant Bull, quite out of turn,

found himself ordered away to what he called a most piffling errand-boy's job.

"And I hope," thought her uncle grimly, "it will keep him a fortnight."

This deed brought something to pass which no one, the doer least of all, could have foreseen. In clearing a chatterbox from his verandah, he left there a young woman with plenty of time for meditation: an active young woman who soon preferred to meditate, if she must, on horseback. One morning after breakfast, therefore, Miriam went for a short ride alone, to be round the station and back before the day grew hot. Whether her friend the tall white horse took his own way, or whether she guided him while thinking of greater affairs than the choice of direction, she never knew; but it is likely that he ambled along by the garden hedges, hoping to overtake his good companions, the bobbery pack; and it is certain, because truthfully reported later by a dozen witnesses, that he with his rider passed through the mud village. The bullock driver by his Persian wheel became as it were historical by swearing that he, of all men the last, watched the Miss sahib go out across the barley stubble.

She gave him salaam. His eyes beheld her. Yes, the horse was white and very high, not a country-bred pony. She rode like a piece of him, cantering.

Beyond the pale barley chaff a good stretch of even ground led toward the river. Desolate country at all times, just then by early morning it held no trace of life anywhere. There were guards near the reed hut, she knew; perhaps unacknowledged at the back of her mind was a hint that someone might be returning by the ford; yet when at last among the slight, deceptive contours of gravel, she woke to look about her, there lay the river indeed, but neither hut nor beach. She had ridden to a lonely curve of the bank, half a mile down stream.

“Farther than I intended to go.”

She reined in her horse. The river wore a forbidding aspect here, not what she remembered, more dreary,—a broad, wandering channel beset with islands, humps of rock, sand-bars, tufts of dead gray bush and withered rushes. Across the clay-green current, far away, linked in puddle and pond and stagnant bay gleamed shallows pale as the sky. There

appeared not even one lonesome crane waiting for breakfast. It was a dead and dismal water, fit to move without purpose through this Childe Roland wilderness.

"Time to run home."

A kite high in air whistled,—a fuzzy black dot on the bilious forenoon light. Nothing else made a sound. It was all different from her last morning here on the bank, all melancholy, emptied of human kind, sicklied over with a glare that hid as much as it revealed, and that vaguely disquieted the soul.

"Yes. Where are we? You have been riding with your head in the clouds. He told you not to come out here. And now you see. No ford, no hut, not a guard in sight."

She drove away this freak of panic or surprise. The loneliness brooding on the river, which had caused it, was after all a token of safety. In another moment she could wheel her horse about and gallop home faster than they had come. Only the heat sprang up wavering on the plain behind, while before them deep channel water flowed gloomily, and overhead the kite whistled without even a winged fellow to answer.

Miriam thought his note derisive, and laughed with him.

"Lack of company does make a change. In what? The person or the landscape?"

She would not wait to examine such a nicety, or to split hairs, but go now. Her helmet, a featherweight bulk of pith, sat awry. Straightening it, the girl remembered how this bother had made them pause in their comical hunt, and so had brought an exchange of words which altered life to the very end. Was it a sad thing, the alteration? Was it a happy? Or being neither, was it worth remembrance?

What he had told her then seemed bitter in the hearing, yet sweet afterward.

"He spoke my name. He called me by it, and did not know."

Her namesake Miriam Bibi had ridden with him to the ford: a poor namesake from an unknown world, beyond the hills, who died in shame and agony. No doubt she, the earlier Miriam, had loved the man.

"About your age," Morgan had said. "Maybe younger. Beautiful, too, with her falcon on her arm, lifted up, so."

One could not be jealous of the dead who are

at rest. The later Miriam was not. And yet—and yet while telling her he had seen always the woman who died rather than she who lived within touch of his hand.

"You," said Miss Wayne, aloud, "are a beast."

The truth prevailed, and cured her. He was a man who loved nothing but the truth. No, for he loved fun as well: she had seen fun in his eyes, when they laughed over Rawlinson, those Ancient Monarchies, and a child poring on the kings of Ur and Accad. He laughed when other men poked fun at him.

"Time to go back now."

She gave a last look at the river. Down from the point of the next island came drifting a nasty object that whirled on the current. It resembled the body of a cow, part hide, part hair, bloated with unclean distension. It bobbed as it came, dipped, and swung. Round the bulge of it a man's face turned into view, a brown face with dripping beard, long ringlets, a mouth spitting out water, and black eyes that saw her in a flash.

The man kicked himself up sprawling on the

bloated bag, raised an arm to point at her, and shouted.

"*Sarnai!*" she thought, gathering the white horse to run.

Other shouts replied. Out of the earth from a gully jumped men in long gowns who pressed about her, laughing, with hot oily faces and a smell as of goats. A tall man, his beard bright purple under a hooked nose, caught her bridle.

PART FIVE
CHILDE ROLAND

PART V.

CHILDE ROLAND

WELL to the north of all this affair, Captain Morgan with twenty troopers followed another task among the hills, in the heat, according to information which was now devious and elaborate, now plain worthless rumor. The troopers enjoyed themselves, but Morgan found the work dull. To recover three stolen rifles by tracking a thief, a master thief, in and out through crooked country and a greater crookedness of liars, was nothing new. One detail, no more, gave the expedition a color of novelty: throughout, by night and day, it lacked some triviality which had never been lacking till now. At the head of his brown-faced, black-bearded *sowars*, who hungered after any word from him and acted on it with zeal, the captain

rode alone. This could only be foolishness, for here they went like a band of brothers, joking difficulty away, watching every chance in their hunt, as keen as Bull's bobbery pack at day-break. Nevertheless he rode alone, an advance point without company.

"I suppose one does go stale," he thought. "Hardly fair to the men."

Their circumvention and capture of the thief, had anyone gone with them to behold, would have been worth seeing. By valley starlight on the long, shadowy hog's-back of a *raghzai* that went rolling down to pitch darkness, they drew their cordon round a black lump, and crept nearer this until the wink of Morgan's electric torch commanded them to halt. The ground was dust, hard as powder of granite, which the next rains would transform to green hill pasture; the lump, a solid cube, the house of a wealthy horse-breeder who, for that night, chose to cover his window and make night-wanderers believe that he lay in bed asleep. Morgan walked to the door and gave a peculiar tap not unknown to East or West.

"Open it," said a voice rising above fright-

ened whispers within. "He is all right, whoever has come."

A bar fell bumping down, and the door swung inward, Morgan with it, his elbow against the wood and two chosen men behind him. Lamp-light streamed up in their faces, from the floor.

"I shouldn't be playing this game," advised Morgan, mildly, "if I were you, Faridun, my friend. Are you in health?"

Two rifles lay beside the lamp. A third rifle hung in the air, balanced across the lower pan of a pair of beam scales, which a stocky little rascal upheld with all his might by the ring. Silver rupees clashed off a mound in the higher scale and ran jingling away. A lean, white-bearded man who had caused them to drop, jumped on foot and stared, holding out both hands, with long scholarly fingers all a-tremble.

"You!" said he, and choked. "Adam Khor? You, sahib?"

Two other men shrank away, treading bare-foot on coins.

"Yes, I am here to correct a mistake," said Morgan. "This fellow—" He nodded at the

thief, who still held the beam as if to hide behind it—"has not eaten your bread and salt, father? No. That is good. He has deceived you. He is a *budmash*, an evil-doer, for these toys being weighed are rifles of the Sarkar. I must take them, and take him. That is all."

Faridun the horse-breeder wrung his long hands.

"I did not know! I did not know, sahib!"

Fear and shame contorted his grin. Guilty, he saw that the captain saw his guilt. It was odious and painful to outface an old man caught so, with bad money shining round his feet.

"That is all," repeated Morgan. "You sold me my mare Bintu 'l Jabal, the Echo, the Daughter of the Mountain, my well beloved. A very sweet-going piece of horse-flesh, father. There was no lie in him who sold her."

"*Barak!* My God," shouted the culprit, "you take your thief and his trash. I am an honest man. I hate the sight of him, sahib. Look. The mare is well? Praise the Lord. Come now with me to the stable, and I will trot out and give you her brother, a beauty, sahib, a babe foaled in the spring, a tiny night-

ingale in this our garden of crows. I will give him to you for love. Durang his name, the Two-Colored, like her, your Echo mare."

Morgan laughed.

"Next winter I will buy Durang of you," he replied, and turned to his waiting troopers. "Here: handcuffs. Remove this thief from under a good man's roof, which he disgraces.—Hallo, outside! A man here, to carry three rifles. Father, salaam on your head. Peace to your house again."

They mounted, set the handcuffed rascal on a led horse between two troopers, and descended picking their way aslant the hog's-back toward the valley. A sound began to follow. They halted; then, the sound becoming hoof-beats, wheeled to face up hill, ready for trouble. A small reddish light jumped over the crest, bobbed, winked, hurried in pursuit,—a lantern, which as it drew near gleamed upon some kind of spotted cattle tearing breakneck down hill.

"Here he is!" cried a voice.

It was that of the old horse-breeder. Swinging a brass lantern in one hand, he rode a piebald mare like Morgan's, but fatter and more sedate. After her galloped a little pie-

bald colt, who at sight of their waiting shadows below him, shied, pulled up stiff-legged, gave a snort, and then took refuge beside his mother.

"Here is Durang, sahib. Yours from the day he was dropped."

Morgan slid to the ground, approached the colt, and patted him.

"You are right, my friend. A beauty."

Echo's brother trembled on his young shanks, but not for long, because this man's hand felt knowing. Cream and pale brown, like a half-ripened chestnut, the infant's motley coat shone in the lantern light. He raised a pink muzzle to the captain's ear.

"Yes, boy. I must come get you next winter. You will be fetching a great price then."

"No, sahib. Take him to-night. He is yours, the little Brug Oss."

Morgan shook his head.

"To-night, it is well understood, I came only to see him, father. If by Heaven's will I found a black rogue trying to deceive you under your own roof, it does my heart good to remove the annoyance from you. A bit of luck by the way. Otherwise not worth a word. But this colt Durang—" The orator patted him—"is en-

tirely as you have reported, and I thank you for sending me word to come look over such a jewel. Keep him safe, your tiny Brug Oss, do not sell him before winter."

In all the dim circle of faces round the lantern, there was not a smile.

"*Bi'llah!*" cried the tall white shape on the mare, "I will keep him for you, sahib, if we wait until his teeth are longer than your sword. Are we not friends? I knew you could not stay away, when a colt like this was growing for you on my hill. Behold him! His ears are shaped like lilies."

The talk wandered off to pedigree, thence to long, minute, exhaustive criticism of the Two-Colored marvel among foals. An hour passed before his owner, with loud extravagance of good wishes, returned up the hog's-back,—a patch of spotted hides fading as it climbed, and the lantern like a disorderly star setting behind the ridge.

"That old reprobate goes home pleased," thought Morgan, who smiled at last in the dark. "But he won't forget the scare. It may do him good. Curious thing, to have a sneaking fondness for him after all."

As they rode down the valley under the stars, a much more curious thing entered his mind.

"She would have enjoyed that little comedy. The picture of it all, you might say."

He meditated, and of a sudden got a stroke of enlightenment. Why, then, what they had gone lacking was her company. That had been the ailment, the dulness right along, the cloud on their expedition.

"By George!" he concluded. "It's true."

The want of someone alongside, to whom he might turn for a look, a word, a sharing of thought: so much he had felt continually, but now he could name that someone. To his inward eye appeared the face of Miriam Wayne, quite near and luminous. He saw her in profile, as when, on their way home from the fort and his ordeal by the gallows, they had ridden together toward the end of the world, straight into a rising moon. Then, as if they had spoken and changed the scene by force of memory, he saw her at dawn upon the river bank, sitting her tall white horse, pulling down the strap of an absurd white helmet, beneath which the delicate glow in her cheeks, the clear youthful

color, the movement of her fingers and the bend of her linen sleeve, had a singular charm, a flower-like freshness alone among all things on the barren sand.

"Good to remember," he warned himself, "but not to expect again. She'll be away soon, back to her own kind. Is gone perhaps now, the lucky child. A flower if you like, but of the past, not the future.—So: happiness go with her."

Consulting night compass and stars, he gave his mare a hint with the rein, and took a new direction out of the black valley. Here was all familiar ground, and for the moment easy enough going. The future: well, what then? He chucked the question aside; and yet even while doing so, became aware that his pleasant glimpse of her brought after it something uneasy, disquiet.

"A slag-heap like this," he thought, "is no place for flowers.—I hope Bashan won't forget to keep an eye on her."

Unaccountable wistfulness, or melancholy, grew and settled into foreboding.

"Miriam.—Could almost wish her name wasn't Miriam."

This was a plain touch of omen; he drove it from his mind, with contempt; but riding slowly on where the jagged night of the hills moved, changed its wavy blot under the stars, and whispered little broken mockery after the horses' hoofs, Morgan felt more and more beset with doubt.

"And I can't see why."

There was no reason for being in the dismals. All had gone well; the men behind him were enjoying the best of health and humor, edified, no doubt, by this night's entertainment on the stock-breeder's *raghzai*; and their work had proved so much quicker in act than in plan, that the troop returned with horses perfectly fresh, and the greater part of their supplies untouched. They had done a rather neat job. Reason, however, lay quite apart and failed to enter the case.

"No. Just going stale, I daresay."

He would take refuge in his own private philosophy, a tag of Euripides which, ever since the half-holiday when he, a schoolboy, rebelliously copied it over and over without end, had become his motto, ingrained, a piece of his nature:—

"Fear of what may come is of no use anywhere."

For once the old saw refused to apply. This was not fear, but misgiving, a baseless conviction, a chimera born of the night, the hills, and the watchful stars, that something had gone or was about to go wrong. It lasted. With no need for hurry, Morgan pushed on homeward till far into the small hours.

"You never know."

By daylight he forgot the nonsense, but resumed his march early and maintained a good hard gait. Some thirty hours afterward, about noon, rounding the point of rocks where she had begged for the jackal's life, he was glad to see the last weary mile of dirt and gravel dance before them in the heat. He had never been so glad to see it as now.

"I believe there's old Bashan pottering about, over yonder, this moment."

Off to his right, past a swerving contour that hid the beach at the ford, a little group of horsemen appeared by mirage to loiter upon a strip of air above an endless mound which he knew to be the river bank. One horse was undoubtedly Bull's favorite roan. As Morgan

looked, this horse darted out from the others and came flying at a gallop, his rider throwing up one hand as if to signal.

The rider was Bull. Something prompted Morgan to halt his troop and turn off, alone, to meet him.

"Old chap!" cried Bull, his horse rearing in a drift of dust. "I hoped it was you."

He looked pale and haggard.

"What now? The station burnt down?"

Ill tidings aged the boy's face.

"No," said Bull, talking in a hurry, sparring for time to delay the blow he had to strike. "I came in only an hour ago. The colonel sent me off a wild goose chase the other day, but it came to nothing, so I got back unexpectedly—"

Morgan cut him short.

"What's happened?"

By his own grief, Bull thought he could judge of the other man's. He stammered, caught breath, and blurted out:—

"Miss Wayne. Hold hard. She's gone. Missing. Her horse came home wet, with the saddle turned under his belly. The poor old colonel—I've been up and down the river—"

In a short, active life he had broken bad news

fairly often, but never to one who took it like this friend, so strangely. He saw Morgan's brown face harden, a snap of the dark eyes, nothing more.

"Ah. Yes. How long?"

He watched the captain climb stiffly down from his mare, jerk both legs to uncramp the joints, then with infinite languor poke down one hand beneath his tunic and draw from a shirt pocket his old black waterproof note-book. A movement so mechanical, at such a time, was enough to dismay the heart. Here stood a man played out, a somnambulist.

"How long? When did her horse come home?"

The words were not sleepy in tone.

"Three quarters of an hour, about. The bullock-driver at the well said—"

"Wait."

Morgan, leaning against the calico Daughter of the Mountain, began to write or sketch in his book, with the saddle for desk. He paused, calculated, bit his pencil, then working away deliberately, spoke.

"Save time. Go take over my troop there. Number them off. Even numbers will give

their bandoleers, water, all remaining food and so on, to the odd numbers, then fall out and wait to go home with you. That leaves ten men with double scouting range. They will come on with me. Luck in odd numbers. The horses are fresh. Do you understand?—Oh, and a prisoner and three rifles to turn in. Carry on, do it, while I do this.”

Taking pains, drawing in the book on the saddle, he neither looked round nor lifted his head. Bull wondered, but rode to the troop and gave order. In the hard crowd of Pathans, it readily became known what spirit lived, which numbers were which; for a deaf man could have told the odd by their flash of teeth in beards, their laughing eyes, the even by their sad obedience while they handed over what they were bidden to relinquish, fell out, formed apart, and waited brooding, unlucky.

When Bull returned, his friend was making a few last marks in the waterproof note-book.

“Here you are.” Morgan tore out a leaf, and beckoned. “Now tell me what you know.”

The knowledge, being scant, was very quickly imparted. Miss Wayne had gone for a ride round the station, her uncle to work after his

morning tea and toast; and then her white horse had walked calmly into the garden, dripping, with the saddle skewed under him. A bullock-driver by the well outside the village, had seen her go cantering, alone, toward the river. The guard at the ford had not seen her.

"That all?"

"All."

"Then listen. And fix it in your mind," said the captain. With one hand on the neck of Bull's roan, he stood holding up in the other his written leaf, which he let Bull take by its corner. It was a map, neatly drawn. "Oriented? Good. See the ferry. Now follow my pencil. There. Zulfikar's Tangai. Have-got? Good. Now up the Tangai: rocks here, a dry waterfall, a hole,—the Snake's Belly. It goes underground. Above it is the Boiler. Fix those points well, compare them with your own *pukkah* map—which won't show their names, by the way—and remember them. See this dotted line? Anything to the north of that is my field. Mine. Do you follow? She's up there, I think. Probably at the village in Gulab Din's valley."

Bashan looked down from the map into its maker's glowing eyes.

"There? Alive? Why, man, the girl is—"

"No, no," said Morgan impatiently. "She's not drowned."

"How do you know?"

"Probability," grunted the other. "Now we're off. Go take in your half the men with their prisoner, and report to the colonel. I suggest a rendezvous at the Snake's Belly,—a small party there, with a lookout on the hill above. Northwest. Right here." Morgan snatched the leaf away, jotted a fresh mark, and crammed the paper into Bull's hand. "Keep it. If we live, she'll come home by that point, the chances are. All clear? Then trot, Bashan, *klak*, and good luck to you, son."

With the word, he was on his mare and swung her head round. At the same instant, both men heard the drum of a gallop, turned to look, and were overtaken by a black-bearded centaur in khaki, who pulled up and saluted.

"We found the hoof-prints of one horse and many bare feet, sahib," cried this messenger, "in the mud by the river."

"Thought so." Morgan gave his friend a

nod. "More than probability, now. She's alive, Bashan. Good-bye."

When the two small cavalcades had parted, however, Bull with his dejected band hurrying toward the station, Morgan with his odd numbers for the ford, it did not seem to either man, in plain, cold truth, that probability could be counted on. The younger, glancing back to watch a helmet among turbans drop from view into the sand, westward, felt by no means convinced that he should see it again.

"He'll never come back without her. If he's right. But is he? The old boy was a bit on the cocksure side."

Only one fact appeared sure to the headful of doubt under that helmet. While he splashed through the ford, Morgan busily reviewed what information had been given. As though he had seen it performing, he knew the deed for a counterstroke of his enemy, Gulab Din. The rest was conjecture.

"A chain of guess work. But the links, I believe, are sound." He had not told Bashan all, for fear of self-conceit. "The man's laid a trap. Study it with Gulab Din's eyes, not your own. This child Miriam, poor little

flower: to a Musalman, she's nothing but a woman. One more woman, of no value. Nothing to bother about, run such a risk for. But he has caught the Man-Eater before, and means to catch him again, for good and all. It's a trap. She is the bait."

Out of the water, across the burning gravel, up the western bank Morgan carried these fragments of thought, all he had for guidance. He endeavored to weigh them coldly, to smother a fire that burned within him.

"Raving egotism, or common sense," he reflected. "Anyhow, I see no other way."

All afternoon, all night, he forced the pace, and next morning led his weary but light-hearted *sowars* up that ravine where he had first heard of Asgar Ali's brother, his adversary. Sunrise flushed the place from its broad mouth up to its notch high in the blue. Nothing moved but their own climbing shadows of man and horse. There was no trace to follow, no footprint left on the scorched rock. Above, little scabs of dark evergreen, each round as a man's head, pitted the shale on the narrowing walls like a disease. Behind one of them, long

ago, that brute Purple-Beard had lain sniping down the gorge.

"A Childe Roland country. She hit the only term for it. *Dais watan*. Beastly."

The captain demanded a sign as they went up. It would resemble the toss of a coin. If now they were fired on, again, he would know that he was wrong; if not, should they be allowed to go through the notch in peace, then he was right in believing all this a trap.

"I wish my old *jemadar* Afzal Khan were here now, this time, too."

They were not fired on; and just at the lower gap of the notch, they were given a more tangible sign. On the ledge of a boulder lay something white. Morgan reached out while passing, took it, and with a queer tightness in his throat recognized the strip of pleated linen, fresh and clean,—the band from her helmet.

"She didn't put it there. Left on purpose for us to find. Yes. Bait along the run-way. Good, my enemy. I'm coming."

He folded the linen with care, wrapped his handkerchief round it, and placed it in a pocket, which he buttoned. Then, beckoning the *sowars* with a little gesture of triumph, rode

almost gaily into the notch. Doubt lay behind. She was alive, being held in order to draw him on, and would do so till the end, whatever that might be. Morgan drew breath as if the stifling air were freshened; he sat erect, a burden gone, his conscience at liberty; for now he could follow not the imaginings of a vain-glorious fool who priced his own head too high, but the certainty of a man who had guessed right. A trap it was. Very well, that left but one thing to do: go into it.

"The only chance for her."

Up here the hills were growing worthy to be called mountains. His course bent hither and yon; overlapping spurs hid the ascent from view, broke it into short crooked scrambles where every turn might hold men lying in wait; but throughout the climb, not so much as the forehead of a watcher gave life to ridge or crag in this dun labyrinth. Stillness bare and dead like that of a world burnt to a cinder, without even one of Beelzebub's flies left to hum, oppressed the heights.

He remembered Zulfikar's Tangai when it opened, a forlorn breach, a ragged wound cutting the rock to run its crazy mile above

them, with a silver gray thread at bottom of dry cascades. Down these he had clambered with the other Miriam. He felt a sudden quite uncanny gratitude toward her, who had shown him the way out, which was now to be the way in. Heat and hurry no doubt confused his ears with a drumming of blood; but for a moment it might have been the dead girl's voice whispering to remind him, so that near the top of the defile he looked up as if ready to see her figure in a *burka*, waiting, shrouded, on the apron of the vanished waterfall.

Of course nothing was there but old worn stone, undercut like toadstools, and carven downward twisting like the trunks of elephants or great evil roots. He had seen them just so before, by morning light, under the Snake's Belly which opened thus, a black door into the mountain.

"From here we go on foot." Morgan turned, to make a brief speech. "There is a long way round for horses, half a day's journey, but I leave ours here, with three men to guard them. Water will be found in that hole: dig the sand out. Seven of you, by lot, I take to Gulab Din's valley, the shortest way."

His troopers eyed one another, smiled broadly, and dismounting at the word tightened their belts and eased their legs with a happy swagger. The casting of lots left three moody men who regarded the horses with an air of mutineers about to hamstring them.

"Follow me carefully. Step where I step. Each man do as the man ahead of him does."

Inside the Snake's Belly a fitful draught rather of lifeless heat than of air, made breathing difficult. Morgan's torch threw its bright circle on the walls and floor, to show a narrow gallery smoothed by the winter torrent which had gone boring through for centuries. Here and there the light flashed into cracks underfoot, deep tombs in one of which thirty feet down lay bones of man or beast piled like a wood-rat's nest on the sediment of a whirlpool. Morgan held his torch pointed at this and other chasms, until the last man came over. It was her hand, Miriam Bibi's, that had brought him across in the dark. Working along edgewise, now with back to one wall, now with breast to the other, he felt, despite this common glare of electricity along the corridor,

a sense that he was being guided underground by the dead.

Sunlight blinded them in the pot-hole of the Boiler. Up the rocks out of gray incandescence that blistered the hand, and smarted like fire through heavy boot-soles, they groped their way to less unbearable open space on a hill-top, then along the summit northward. By compass, with a memory of how the dead girl and the stars in their courses had led him, Morgan went searching among the peaks for his enemy's hidden valley.

"And here it is."

Below, dust-brown fields patchworked with hoary millet stubble fell curving to hem in a crease of foliage—green leaves, *kikar* boughs with paler mustard beneath—which bordered a meandering watercourse. Green leaves, as refreshing as cool drink after thirst, had in that desolation a magical beauty, but yet a beauty imprisoned; for their strip of verdure wandered up the crooked maze, feebly tried to climb out, and failed in a high ravine. Houses, flat ugly blocks of stone, held aloof on either side, and squatting like toads, distrusted one another.

"Here something will happen."

To his great chagrin, however, Morgan found that nothing did. He and the seven men went down, advanced with method from house to house, and in a kind of unholy Sabbath quiet, encountered no one to check their progress. The settlement, from end to end, contained women, stupidly afraid; children motionless, naked, like statues of bronze with living eyes that watched gravely; two infirm grandfathers, one bed-ridden, the other blind with cataract, neither of whom would speak; a tribe of cringing dogs; and a solitary cripple who limped away on his crooked stick, an adulterer with half his right foot chopped off, the stump badly healed.

Morgan overtook this retreating figure.

"Where are your men?"

"Gone," said the outcast.

"I wish to see Gulab Din. Where is he?"

"Gone."

"Yes. But gone where?" It was no time to have scruples, or be nice. "Look, in my hand: here is money for a word or two."

The cripple did more than look; he stared at Morgan's bribe of silver, his eyes greedily burning, for a long time; but in the end he

woke, backed slowly from this white devil, gaped with fear, shook his head, and went hobbling as fast as he could go.

"It is plain," considered Morgan, "that our friend the Purple-Bearded Afrit has left instruction, and is not a good man to be disobeyed."

He paused in the shade of a house front, not for rest, but for a bit of thinking. The troopers near by, each man with carbine in hand, watched up and down the valley suspecting mischief to come at any moment from anywhere, above all from that green cover of trees by the brook. He could not partake of their hope. The village was empty and blank. Where to move next he did not know, and to wait was torment.

Bare feet pattered in dust. Round the corner of the house, before him, popped a small head, a brown chubby face with sparkling eyes, and a naked arm that beckoned. These withdrew as quick as a rat into a hole.

Morgan walked round the corner, but saw no one there.

"Sahib," came a whisper.

From behind the house, quickly again, the

same brown arm beckoned once. Continuing this hide and seek, Morgan turned the second corner, and ran into a very small boy, who dodged back, grinning, with a salaam.

"What is it?"

The child wore a black rag of skull-cap and round his loins a twist of filthy cotton. His body, well-nourished, long-muscled, tough and straight as a bolt, glistened like copper in the sun. His eyes danced with glee, the malice of a changeling, a bad fairy's imp.

"Sahib." Though they stood concealed, he peered all round with aged craftiness, and made a sign that they draw farther out from the wall. "Sahib, I know," he whispered. "I can take you where the Miss sahib is."

Morgan stared, though all the time he had looked for some such word.

"Yes. Then do."

"But it is a long way," murmured the urchin. "And you must come alone."

"You're a bright boy." Morgan smiled at him. "Alone? Do you think that is likely?"

A grin of diabolic humor crossed the child's face, and left it solemn.

"I speak truth. If you come alone, you

shall find her. Not otherwise. And it is true, for I am the messenger of an old friend. Look, sahib. I bring a token."

On the boy's palm lay a knife,—a clasp-knife, shut, with stag-horn haft and a farrier's hook. It was the tool with which Morgan had removed a pebble from her horse's hoof, and which his old *jemadar*, Afzal Khan, had coveted as a parting gift.

"Who gave you this?"

"He." The malicious black eyes glittered with understanding. "The owner. He to whom you gave it."

This might be true or false. The knife was right enough, above suspicion; but Afzal Khan might have died weeks ago, shot in the back for the sake of this very thing. No matter; no alternative; here had come the one chance.

"Lead off, then. I go with you."

"But first, another promise," urged the boy. "First, the *sowars* must go back from this village. You must leave them at the Boiler, sahib."

"Leave them in the Bottomless Pit," rejoined Morgan. "I'll do nothing of the kind. Hot enough to fry fish there."

"Well, where the sahib pleases. But not north of the Boiler."

"*Bakh, bakh!*" said the captain, approving, and smiled again on this infant ambassador. "Yes, you are a bright child, to speak out your message so well and boldly. Some day you will be a man."

The imp stiffened.

"Will be?" he drawled, with scorn. "I am!"

"And a great liar and cut-throat, more's the pity," thought Morgan. Aloud, he added:—"Come. I accept the terms."

At the house he bought what food the women had to sell, a bag of flat unleavened bread, half a cheese made from goat's milk, and a quart of good fresh water for his bottle. These he carried himself, because they were for her, when found. Returning by the hill above the Snake's Belly, he ordered his men, a disconsolate seven, down to join the three with the horses, and wait.

One old trooper flatly rebelled.

"That boy is a black-faced son of shame!" he cried. "You go to your death, *Captan sahib.*"

The others nodded with him, frowning and muttering.

"No," said Morgan. "Obey the order, Habibulla Khan. And here: keep thou my sword and spurs. Too noisy. I travel in quiet. So. And I return."

They wavered, then climbed growling down the rocks like seven brown bears.

"As good a lot as man ever trained." Morgan watched them for a moment. "I wonder—" No, it would not do to wonder if he should ever lead them again. Not likely. He turned to his boy guide. "Now show the way."

Those little copper legs were very nimble. They trotted before him as fast as any grown man, travelling even on life and death, could follow in this blaze of reflected heat. Westerly toward the lowering sun, up and down over pathless rock hurried the boy, who neither spoke nor glanced behind. Morgan had seen bad country in his day, but after climbing for an hour, crossing a ridge, and entering a new and higher intricacy of gorges, he felt himself to be a novice. Dreariness, wild jumbles of contour and direction, twisted, broken-backed slants of mountain edge, sliced precipices, the

gloomy color, the unmeaning savagery of it all, as time went on oppressed him like nightmare. To go scrambling here seemed a hopeless effort. His only hope, indeed, was not much: perhaps Afzal Khan lived, had sent the knife: and that much he could not indulge. The sender of the token would be an enemy, no matter who.

"Give up thinking ahead. Go on. Walk into the snare, then do what little or nothing you can."

So his other self commanded; yet by habit, although he might never employ the knowledge, he studied their course with vigilance, often looking back to fix landmarks for the return. At sunset the pair toiled up a steep defile, between slides of broken rock, egg-shaped, keen-pointed, as though lightning had blasted a hill into macadam. The boy, with his tattered sandals, winced at every step. Gaining the upper end of this pass, he halted for breath.

"My aunt," said the captain, "what a beastly gap!"

Above them opened, eight feet wide and perhaps one hundred high, a black slit. Morgan had never beheld such a forbidding portal.

"What's the name of it?"

"Zaghar's Mouth." His little companion spoke with awe. "By night it is full of devils. The Yawn of Lot's Daughter."

Dusk had already gathered in this chimney when they entered. The bottom, and the black sides for a height above a tall man's head, were smoothed by water to a waxy polish that looked and felt unwholesome. Half way through, an owl suddenly fluttered the darkness and escaped. The boy, imp though he might be, hung back, stayed close to Morgan, and advanced like a timid spy. The Yawn of Lot's Daughter was a doleful place. When they came out, Morgan gave a shrug of relief.

"I don't cotton to Miss Zaghar at all," he said. "Where next?"

"There, sahib."

Twilight showed them a black, narrow, stupendously deep gorge, slanting above and far below them on all sides like a funnel. The same ominous rock which lined Zaghar's Mouth here darkened everything visible under a fading heaven, except for a streak or two of iron gray, and a ghastly blotch of white like vile soap or candle grease melted and dripping down.

"There. The *monrai*."

To the right, on the rim of the funnel, perched, high and four-square, tapering somewhat to its flat top, a dark tower.

"You will find her."

The boy started on, climbing a ledge that curved up toward this block of masonry. Morgan, as he followed, slipped his wrist into the thong of his revolver, and hung the food bag on his other forearm, ready to be dropped.

The ledge broadened at the foot of a stone platform, twenty feet high, against which leaned a ladder.

"Up, sahib," whispered the urchin, and with the words ran off. A speck of gray loin-cloth, he vanished into rock.

Morgan's heart beat quickly while he mounted the rungs. He would know soon what waited up there,—Afzal Khan, and perhaps life, or Gulab Din's gang and death. The ladder sagged and trembled as he put his head cautiously over the top.

"Neither. Nobody."

It was almost a shock to find the platform bare. He hoisted the leather bag on it, then crawled after, and stood up. Across the plat-

form, with door open, a stump of native rock, rose the dark tower.

The same riddle waited again for an answer. Which would be inside there, good or evil? He gripped the butt of his Webley, stole to the door, and leaned his head gradually past the edge of the jamb.

He saw nothing but a bare stone room. Its black walls and floor quenched what twilight strayed within. A bundle was leaning propped in one corner. He had set foot on the threshold, when this bundle moved, took shape through the gloom, and lifted a head with a glimmer of bright hair. It was Miriam Wayne.

She sat upright, stared, then gave a cry of welcome.

"Childe Roland!"

Delight breaking through the words told him he was expected.

"Hush! No," said Morgan. "Come on. Quick as you can."

Without waiting for her, he turned to cross the platform. As he did so, there came a scraping, bumping sound, a murmur of voices, a shuffle of bare feet. The top of the ladder

slid away sidelong and dropped. Morgan, running to the verge, knew beforehand what he should see, though not all. The ladder was balancing down crosswise into a mob of gray-gowned figures on the ledge below, who caught it, glanced upward, saw him, and yelled. They waved arms, laughed, hooted. Among and overtopping them, Gulab Din wagged his broad beard on his chest, rolling from side to side in a glory of derision. But what Morgan had not foreseen, the worst, was the old familiar face of his *jemadar*, Afzal Khan, who stood clutching the fallen ladder with one arm crooked through the rungs, holding with his other hand the boy who had brought the knife, and laughing harder than all the rest.

"No, come away." Morgan wheeled in despair, met her close behind him, caught her with a roughness that was meant for protection, and swept her backward to the tower. "Not now."

All the mountainous hole of the black funnel rang echoing cat-calls, laughter, obscene names bandied from rock to rock.

"What was it?" she asked.

He forced himself to reply calmly, not to hear the noise.

"We must wait here till morning." He picked up the bag of food and the water-skin. "I've brought you some supper. Aren't you starved? How have they treated you? How are you, dear?"

The word slipped out unaware in his trouble of mind. She gave a quiet little laugh. To hear it repaid him for all, somehow, and made their present danger a thing of naught.

"Perfectly well, and not starving. I knew you would come."

"Of course. Let's go in," said he, "and have supper."

The heavy black walls, and a broken door which he contrived to heave into place and shut, deadened the yelling echoes. He put down his bags and fumbled in the dark.

"Shine my torch here one moment, will you?"

Over a circle of light, while he got from his pocket an old tin tobacco box and opened it, their eyes met clearly for the first time that evening. They smiled at each other.

"Here we are."

The box contained a few candle ends, half melted and run together in a cake. Morgan broke one off, struck a match, and lighted the wick.

"Now for a feast."

When they sat on the floor with two inches of candle burning between them, flat unleavened bread and goat's-milk cheese to share, Morgan encouraged her by feigning appetite. Meantime he watched her keenly with stolen glances. Her brown holland clothes were stained, bedraggled after a wetting, but their disorder, as well as the trace of wildness in her hair, only enhanced a charm that touched him like something new, intimate, pathetic. She appeared younger than ever, not so much a woman as a runaway child playing gipsy. The loveliness of candle-light upon her throat, in her eyes, unmanned him. This black prison was no place for a flower, to-night no time for beauty.

He put gruff questions.

"Why, no one really tried to hurt me," she answered. "Yes, of course they frightened me. Lieutenant Bull was wrong, for two men could swim. They led my horse into the river,

took me across, brought him back, loosened his girth, and gave the poor beast a cruel cut to drive him home. Those two swam like fish. The others looked funny, bobbing on their great bags.—No, the heat was the worst part of it all.—No, not a finger. Oh, yes, one man did snatch my helmet and take off the—what do you call the trimming?”

Morgan smiled.

“Here’s your *safah*.” He unwrapped his handkerchief. “We recovered it for you.”

She weighed the pleats of linen thoughtfully.

“And,” she said, “you have never even scolded me!”

“Scold you?” cried the Captain. “I?—I—Don’t you see?”

He had not meant to say it. Their eyes met again. Hers were star-like, adorable.

“All the time I knew you were coming, Childe Roland.” She looked down, speaking low. “And when we saw this tower—”

“Don’t,” said Morgan, quickly. “I can’t bear that.”

“Can’t bear what?”

He had nearly said too much. The poor child must be thinking that he had his troop

here with him, thinking he brought deliverance. In God's name let her be deceived, to get a night's rest.

"That poem."

"Why, don't you like it?"

"Not a bit." The relief of having turned their talk, skated over thin ice, made him laugh unsteadily. "No, nor its writer."

Miriam sat regarding him with disappointment.

"Why not?"

"Robert Browning?" said he. "Wordy. Holds the floor for ever. Horrid bad manners. A non-stop champion Marathon holder of the floor. A man can't do it, you know, without talking rubbish."

The device worked. She took up arms against him.

"Captain Morgan, will you please tell me one piece of rubbish that—"

He grinned.

"Yes. Lots. By the yard. If you please won't forget to eat. Here's one, out of your own poem. '*Dauntless the slug-horn to his lips he set, and blew.*' There, now. What is a slug-horn? Tell me."

"Why, it's—I don't know exactly, but—" She knitted her young brows. "It must be a kind of—"

His counter-attack had been too swift for her. They both laughed.

"Don't try, for you can't," said he. "No such utensil. Browning ran across an old form of the word 'slogan.' Didn't know what it meant; but it looked fancy and mediæval and romantic. So in his hands the thing became a trumpet. Whence he blew dauntless balderdash. No, you can't defend him. Worse than rubbish, plain Wardour Street. Fake antique."

The incongruity of such talk now, and the success of his trick, made him chuckle. He looked merrier than she had ever seen him.

"How on earth did you know that?"

"Oh, trumpets and bugles and bagpipes," he replied. "Uncouth war-like instruments. Part of a man's profession.—It's quiet outside. Shall we try the fresh air?"

Throwing the broken door aside, and extinguishing the candle with a wave of his helmet, he followed her out to the platform. Stars burned lustrous over the black hole in the black mountains, where not a draught stir-

red, not a breath. Leaning against their tower, side by side, the pair talked with voices lowered. Miriam found it strangely pleasant and home-like to hear what this man of action thought about books. Many which everyone read, he had not heard of; many others that she had never heard of, were at his fingers' ends, chapter and verse. Not once in their evening together did the girl suspect that he led the talk with guile, employed those horrid bad manners of a wordy poet, and desperately held the floor.

Afterward she remembered the change and the close.

"Books aren't much," he said. "No can-do, no can catchee. The world's too big and nimble for 'em. Look here, while on the schoolmaster tack, I'll set you a paper in the world. Ready? Go. The world begins at this platform. This door faces nearly west."

With minute care he described the way, landmark by landmark, down to the Snake's Belly.

"Now," he commanded, "tell me how you would go there. Pretend you were going alone."

Miriam pretended, for pastime.

"Plucked," he broke in. "Start again."

She tried once more, and was corrected sharply at every mistake.

"Good. You would pass," grumbled Morgan. "Fix that in your head. It may be important." He gave her no time to ask why, but added: "Getting late. Bed-time. I'll sleep across the door."

He did not keep his promise; for when he had stayed a long while by the platform edge, smoking his pipe, watching the stars, he returned to the tower, indeed, and sat down with his legs across the doorway, but neither would nor could fall asleep. The night was very still. He heard her quiet breathing inside the room. It was the one sound, unbelievably tranquil, and might have soothed him at any other time, but now in the darkness came to his ear like a slow torture.

"No doubt the child said her prayers, and dropped off," he meditated. "She's that kind of woman. Reared so. Resting like that. And to-morrow. O Faith, what a bag of tricks you are!"

Morgan drew up his knees, crossed his arms

on them, and leaned his forehead there in great bitterness of spirit.

With time this passed away, but left him devoid of feeling, numb. After midnight a sound in the darkness below startled him. It was only a man snoring. No one moved or spoke. Later, filling his pipe, Morgan was annoyed to find the pouch almost empty, and then laughed under his breath.

"Enough to last out your time."

He smoked frugally, however, keeping a long interval between puffs. About three o'clock in the morning, he heard Miriam stir and wake with a little shuddering cry, like a child's.

"It's all right," said he. "I'm here."

"Oh. I thought you hadn't come," she drowsily murmured. "The smell of your tobacco is a great comfort . . . Bad dreams are . . ."

"Go to sleep," advised Morgan. "All's well."

She sighed, moved uneasily on the hard floor, then became still again but for the quiet breathing. He would continue the vigil, though his

head began to nod, and once with a jerk he caught his pipe from falling.

It was dawn when he woke, ashamed, angry, to find pipe and ashes in his lap, and knowledge of whereabouts gone.

"Good morning."

Inside the tower, Miriam stood with bent arms uplifted, a figure of grace, giving her hair the last pats and touches.

"You poor man. I hoped you would go on sleeping."

With bright eyes and clear color, she looked fresher than the dawn. Even her wrinkled dress had been coaxed into life. She brought him a cracked earthenware bowl full of water, and laughing to see how vigorously he dealt with it, busied herself elsewhere.

"Breakfast is ready."

She handed him a dry cake of unleavened bread. They were talking as they ate, when Morgan raised his head quickly, glanced round the black room, hearkened, and stepped to the doorway.

"It's come," he thought.

Footsteps and voices gathered below. Wood thumped on stone, and over the platform, slid-

ing carefully upright, rose the ends of the ladder.

He turned back to her.

"Miriam. They're coming."

"Your men?"

She watched his dark face grow strange, as though he were fighting off mortal sickness.

"No, dear. Pathans. Waziris. I have no men. I came alone. It was the only way to find you."

He had confessed. With this deadly fact of which he had known the weight all night, he struck her.

"Alone?"

To his wonder, he saw tears fill her eyes, and knew they were for him. Before the selflessness of this woman's look in the twilight, Morgan's heart and soul bowed down.

"You are the bravest of gentlemen," she said. "And I love you. It is right you should know. If I could do more—"

She gave her hand. He bent and touched it with his lips.

"Come. They are here," he said. "Stand close by me, face them, and do whatever I tell you. They will let you go. I have a plan.

Don't forget our lesson in geography, last night. Come."

They passed through the doorway hand in hand. Long-robed Waziri men, a quiet procession, were stepping one by one over the topmost round of the ladder, and moving in line gravely to join a crowd already gathered across the far end of the platform. This morning there were no unmannerly gestures, no shouts. Tribesman after tribesman walked to his place, then waited, the hindmost ranks afoot, the foremost hunkered down, squatting. Their eyes glowed, but their hatchet faces between the earlocks were set in a uniform hard lack of expression. The tower platform was broad. They numbered forty or fifty, as Morgan guessed, yet thus packed in order they left a wide space empty on which to view their prisoners. Beyond the row of skull caps and turbans appeared nothing but rock, ebony color, iron gray, and across the funnel that streak of soapy white outcrop, livid in a growing light. The air of dawn felt neither cool nor clean. Worn out, the gritty heat was resting a while, waiting to begin another day.

"Keep your mind at ease." Morgan pressed

her hand before letting it go. "Look your proudest, for we're on inspection. You're quite safe."

Two faces dominated the crowd, known faces that in the general staring fixity wore each a look of significance and purpose. The front row curved somewhat inward, forming a rough semicircle. On the left of this Afzal Khan, hook-nosed, thin-lipped, stood with head and shoulders thrown back, like a falcon roused at sight of prey. Near the centre Gulab Din of the purple beard, his eyes bloodshot with drink or late hours, held a swaggering attitude, though relaxed and jovial.

"Don't be surprised at what I do," said Morgan. "Here goes. I'll be back alongside you at once."

With that, holding his revolver by the muzzle, he walked straight to Afzal Khan.

"Here. I am your prisoner, *jemadar* sahib." He offered the butt of the weapon. "You took me in a cunning snare, and I submit to you. But this lady, the child of your colonel's sister—let her go free."

The reply defeated him. For a moment the

old *jemadar*, tossing his head yet higher, sneered with cold eyes.

"The *ghushaya* of an Englishman thinks I am still his hired bullock." Afzal Khan jerked the revolver away, stuffed it into his bosom, and laughed. "We are all free men here. At the barber's wedding every man is a lord."

Morgan returned to her side, without hope, but without change of countenance. A few of the younger Waziris cackled. It was Gulab Din who rebuked their levity, though himself grinning.

"Proceed in order. This is a *kunsel-data*." For his joke he used the Persian corruption of the French, picked up somewhere among northern gossips. "A council of state. Be solemn, brothers. I have a word yet to say, for it was I who caught him."

Morgan moved forward and spoke.

"To you all. I, your enemy, walked here alone of my own will, to bargain this life"—He struck his breast—"for that." And he made a sign of the hand toward Miriam. "No one can say it was not the deed of a man."

He paused. His hearers kept an unwinking silence.

"Come. You have the Man-Eater, once for all. Set the lady free. She is no enemy. Her land is not at war with yours, and is a vast nation, powerful. She is of America, a great princess of Yangistan. Let her go in peace."

He stepped back, and waited. The councillors of state had a new thing to ponder; they turned their heads one to another, frowning, muttering; and of these heads a few nodded in approval.

"The deed," growled someone, "of a man. True."

Morgan felt her arm against his, a contact light as thistledown, thrilling as a current of new strength. It came at need. His throat had been horribly dry and tight, so that he feared his voice might have broken.

"Steady. Hold hard," he thought. "Never say die."

He heard her speaking, calmly, as if they stood apart to watch what did not concern them.

"How Old Testament all those faces are.

Children of Israel, bad children murmuring in the wilderness."

He smiled at her.

"They believe they're descended from Saul, King of Israel. It may account for their disposition. That and the climate and the crooked rocks. Poor devils, it's not a country to support an honest man farming. Your friend with the gaudy beard, there, is Gulab Din. The name would mean He who Wears his Religion like a Rose."

The stir which had gone throughout their assembly, rippling from head to head, died away. Their brown faces grew set again, their eyes fanatically still.

"And now I say my word." The broad Gulab Din rolled himself loose from his neighbors, and spread his bosom comfortably. "I have never been a hired bullock. Twice have I caught this infidel, this firebrand of hell, the *balak-chor* who stole my bride and sent her home shameless. Did I want his leavings then? Do I want them now? No. Let the woman go free. She is not worth a goat. But he, the Man-Eater, is mine. Him I take down that

ladder, out through Zaghar's Mouth, now, before sunrise, and kill."

The speaker was wearing Morgan's old belt and holster. He smacked them with his hand.

"Now!"

"He will send you home," said Morgan, and went quickly to the ladder-head. "Good. A bargain. Ready, Gulab Din."

A harsher voice checked him.

"O fool, and blind!" cried Afzal Khan, jumping forward in a rage. "Bargain for what we hold in hand? Do you not see?" He shook his fist at Morgan. "The fellow is ours, and he would buy a mouse-hole for a hundred rupees! It is a trick, who can tell? Ours? No, he is mine. I sent the knife. It was my sister's child, Miriam Bibi, whom he stole and flung away to her death, when we were milk and sugar together. Two-hearted hypocrite, he blackens the world for me. I know his ways, I have ridden with him. No more of us he shall eat, nor the woman go down to breed more like him. They are both mine, and I kill both."

Morgan could not believe the furious words. He moved, to speak. But in Afzal Khan's

predatory face the eyes glittered as with madness. There was no hatred, they told him, like the hatred of a lost friend.

"I am more than nine years old," sneered Gulab Din, as cool as the other was hot. "I have cut my *nab* tooth. The man is mine. Stand away."

Two Pathans, laying hold of Afzal Khan by his robe, would have restrained him. The old *jemadar* knocked them flying with a backward sweep of both arms, and strutted into the open, his hand upon the hilt of his government sword.

"Yours?" he bellowed. "You?"

He spat out one short word that names a swindler, a coward, and something even more beastly. It had a quick but unforeseen effect. Roaring, Gulab Din bent to snatch up his *chore*, and ran forward, head down, the long straight knife gripped low, pointed like a lance. Yet in full career he swerved round the *jemadar* and came charging Morgan.

It seemed years while he crossed the platform. There was time to wonder at the lightness of that bulk, to see how the purple hairy bush became heliotrope under his mouth, to see the blade shine like glass. Morgan felt his

own movement to be slower than all, clogged with time, as he dived face down on the black slabs. An ankle beneath a flap of skirt jarred into his hands. He caught it with all his might, shoved while he slid, and let go quickly. A tiny hot sting, like the nick of a razor, passed between his shoulder-blades.

He would have risen, but bare feet trampled over him. Sitting up, and turning, he saw the platform edge lined with Pathan backs. Afzal Khan, dealing here a curse and there a blow, fought to clear them from the head of the ladder.

"Aye, look down!" he jeered while he smote. "A bird without wings! Look down and see it!"

Morgan got dizzily on his legs, and saw below the ladder, below the shelf of rocky path from which it leaned to the platform wall, a grayish figure sprawling across a rock, some hundred feet down the ebony funnel. Gulab Din, a bird without wings, had flown clear of everything from the verge, and landed on his back. With head hanging, beard uppermost, his neck evidently broken, he lay spitted upon his own knife.

A small boy in a rag of black skull-cap who just then came running up the path, lifted his face, tried to speak, failed, gasped, made a sign with his hand, and dodged away somewhere. Morgan saw him as in a dream, knew him for the little urchin guide of yesterday, and had a vague belief that Afzal Khan returned the signal. It all meant nothing.

"Another deed of a man," said the *jemadar*, and pointed down at the sprawling body. "That would have taken my kill, a moment ago."

He turned to Morgan, savagely.

"Go down, you and your woman," he snarled. "The sun must not find you two alive."

The crowd parted from about them, right and left. Morgan went slowly to Miriam, who returned with him. Her face was very white; her hand was cold, but it did not tremble in his.

"As soon as you touch ground, run," he whispered. "Run, and I will throw down the ladder. Run. East. Your lesson."

She did not reply.

"The lady first," said Morgan, aloud. "It is our custom."

Afzal Khan jerked her away.

"Down," said he.

She smiled as their eyes met over the top rung, then with light, sure placing of hand and foot, descended.

"Run," called Morgan. "Go. Run."

She stood on the ledge, in the path, but did not move except to look up at him with eyes that shone.

"Never. I stay with you."

He grasped the ladder by the ends, to fling it out. Afzal Khan had him round the waist. Other Pathans beat his hands from their grip, bruising them against the wood.

"I go next. You follow."

The *jemadar* pushed him staggering back, leaped nimbly upon the ladder, and dropped from sight. Morgan, with no sense of intervening action, was presently on the ledge, behind Miriam. They were climbing down the path. Above them a great shout rose, a tumult of curses, and a crash. Morgan did not look round. He knew that Afzal Khan came driving them, with a long double-barrelled pistol in each hand. The old scoundrel was muttering to himself.

"Ha! I might have trusted the devil's brat, after all."

They climbed down the black chimney of Zaghar's Mouth, in single file.

"And when she stayed by the ladder, then I knew my word was a true word. It is the same breed. Gulab Din was a liar. Ha! She is worth more than a goat."

This babble continued, step after step. Into the Yawn of Lot's Daughter pierced a fiery shaft, glimmering where water had smoothed the black corridor, and far above, reddening the edges along a slit of sky. Changes did not matter, nor time with its hours and days. The will, like the sense of action, lay dead. Morgan felt only that his back was wet, and his last drain of strength going. He had better turn here to fight if he could.

Facing round, he managed to keep his feet.

"Go on, *captan* sahib."

The hole was not full of Waziris. No one stood here but Afzal Khan, grinning his old wicked grin, like a father, and offering his pair of long pistols, butt first.

"Take them, sahib, and shoot me if you will, for the names I called you. What else could

I do? The one safe messenger had gone to your station, and how could I trust my cousin's little boy? We are all liars. But he has thrown down the ladder."

What was this fellow saying? Morgan looked on him with drunken eyes.

"Go forward, sahib. It is only a scratch. They are here, outside the Mouth. Go you first, for I do not care to be shot by them."

It was all without meaning, all. Morgan put a hand to the rock, made his body turn, and reeled on, for he heard Miriam cry to him aloud.

Past a corner, the fulness of red sunshine dazzled him. There were horses, men in khaki, good silly old Bashan, a lot of chaps he knew in this dream. Why were they so staring and grim and tired?

"Who's the Pathan?" barked the colonel's voice. "Look out, there!"

"Don't shoot," begged Afzal Khan somewhere, laughing. "I've come back for more of your bread and salt. The taste lingers in a man's throat, sahib. And I can't go home now for a year or two!"

The sunshine was turning white and closing in a circle. Miriam's face was the last to go.

"Quick!" she was calling. "His back's all blood!"

"A scratch." His *jemadar* answered from farther and farther off. "I walked behind him and saw it well. A love-pat of the blade, to do him good."

In the world as it flickered together, closing, a woman's hair shone.

"Bare-headed. The sun." He could not keep his voice down. It squeaked. "Go back to the tower and fetch her helmet, please, will you, somebody"

So saying, the man-eater leaned against whatever it was, and fainted in her arms.

THE END.

